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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



EVELYN, ALL HER FACULTIES KEENLY ALERT, SCANNED THE FIGURE FROM HEAD TO HEEL IN BREATHLESS CURIOSITY!

**THE MYSTERY OF THE MONK'S ROOM.**

(Concluded.)

**[A NOVELETTE.]**

**CHAPTER VII.**

EVELYN, with the consent of the solicitor, took possession of Lynbridge Court as its mistress—or rather, it would be more correct to say that Mr. Fenton took possession of it for her. The distant cousin who, but for her existence, would have been heir, returned from abroad in great haste, and declared his intention of contesting her right to the estates, but one interview with the solicitor made him think better of that intention.

"My dear sir," said his legal adviser, "you have not a leg to stand on. I have seen copies of the certificates of the young lady's birth, and her parents' marriage, and I have no doubt whatever that she is the heiress."

His client swore a naughty oath, and then

went back to Italy again, trying vainly to console himself for the loss of a splendid heritage which had so nearly become his own. Meanwhile, Dudley Fenton assumed the reins of government, and became virtually master of the Court, giving orders in a lordly way that greatly exasperated the servants, some of whom at once gave notice and left, while others stayed on for the sake of "Miss Evelyn" as they still continued to call her.

Poor Evelyn! During the whole of the day following the interview in the library which we have just recorded, she remained in her room, attended by Lucy Needham, while she tried to plan out some definite arrangements for the future by which she might get rid of Dudley Fenton.

The mere sense of the man's presence haunted her like a nightmare.

She disliked as much as she dreaded him, and all the while there was an icy fear at her heart lest he might regain that strange magnetic power over her which, twelve months ago, had been strong enough to force her will to yield to his.

So great was this fear that it is likely enough

she would have endeavoured to leave the Court and escape him, as she had done on the day of her marriage, but for the fact that she was watched so closely by Lucy Needham that escape became impossible.

The thought of Ronald was absolutely maddening in its pain, and yet the longing to see him once more increased with each hour of the day.

On the second evening Fenton sent up word to say that he desired her presence in the library.

Evelyn's first impulse was to refuse to obey the summons; but on second thoughts she determined to go. The interview was bound to take place sooner or later, and she gained nothing by putting it off.

Her heart beat violently as she descended the stairs, and outside the library door she paused for a moment on the mat, making a great effort of will.

She would not yield to this man's evil influence—surely Heaven would help her to resist it!

She was older and stronger than she had been twelve months ago, and absence had also tended to break the chain of association.

At any rate, she would make a hard struggle to hold her own.

Fenton was standing on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire.

He was in evening dress; but he wore a black tie by way of mourning, and until one studied his face closely he looked the ideal of a handsome, prosperous English gentleman.

As Evelyn came in he drew up an armchair close to the fire.

"Sit there, my dear child. How pale you look! I am afraid you had no sleep last night. Really, Evelyn, you must permit me to congratulate you on the improvement this last year has made in you! You are far handsomer than when Marcus fell in love with you and married you last Christmas eve."

A burning blush succeeded the pallor on the young girl's cheek.

She took the seat he offered, and put her hand to her face—ostensibly to shield it from the fire, but really to hide it from him.

All the while she carefully abstained from meeting his eyes.

"Have you no question to ask concerning your husband?" he continued, in a half-mocking tone. "Have you no wish to hear how he is?"

"None whatever," she rejoined, firmly. "So long as he keeps away from me, that is all I require from him."

"Indeed! That is not a very wisely sentiment, but it is better that you and I should speak plainly to each other, and it was on that very point I was anxious to come to a full understanding with you. You mean me to infer that you desire Marcus should make no effort to see you."

She bent her head in token of assent.

"Well, I think it may be managed, and as you seem to have kept your prejudice against your husband it will be better, perhaps, that you should continue to live apart for a year or two longer. But, of course, you must make him a liberal allowance—that is only fair."

"I will make him whatever allowance he wishes. I would give him the whole of my fortune if, by so doing, I could dissolve the tie between us!" she exclaimed, passionately.

"Ah, but that is impossible. The law does not let husbands and wives change their minds just as the fancy takes them, and you have no grounds for a divorce. No, my dear Evelyn; I fear you must make the best of your position as a married woman."

"Married by the vilest plot of which any girl was ever the victim!" she cried, her breast heaving with bitterest indignation at the remembrance of her wrongs.

Fenton threw out his hands with the little foreign gesture peculiar to him.

"All things are fair in love and war, as I believe I have observed to you before."

"There was no love in the case. I see now why you wished the marriage. You thought it would secure you the heiress of Lynbridge, and for the sake of the money you ruthlessly sacrificed my life's happiness."

"Well, my dear, perhaps you are right, but self-preservation is the first law of nature, and my first duty was to my son. I had another motive too," he added, his dark brows knitting together in a heavy frown, and his eyes glittering vindictively beneath them. "I had a wrong to avenge—a wrong done me by your mother, Isabel Chandos, years ago. She won my love, and then scorned it as if it had been an insult. I swore then I would cry quits with her some time, and at last I think I may say we are even!"

It is impossible to describe the malignancy both of the man's voice and expression, as he uttered these words. Evelyn drew back shuddering, and the movement seemed to recall him to himself.

"However, we need not enter into these details," he went on, in his ordinary tone. "We have the future to deal with, not the past. I suppose, it is your wish to stay on at the Court?"

"Yes," listlessly. "I do not care much where I live."

"Very well, then we will decide on remaining here for the next three months, and after that I may perhaps take you abroad. Of course I shall

stay with you, and look after your business matters for you, but I will give you a guarantee that Marcus shall neither write, nor make any attempt to see you. Does that satisfy you?"

Before she could speak, the door was thrown open by Lumley, who announced "Mr. Ronald Heron," and then withdrew, smiling to himself in a triumphant manner at this direct disobedience of Mr. Fenton's orders—for that gentleman had given strict injunctions that Mr. Heron was not to be admitted when he called.

Walking with the aid of a stick, Ronald entered. His glance fell first on Mr. Fenton, but it did not rest there more than half-a-second, for he caught a glimpse of the shrinking figure in the arm-chair, and he came towards it, his eyes full of unutterable love.

"Evelyn—my dearest!"

She rose to her feet, pale and trembling, but putting out her arms as if to ward him off. For a moment she could not speak, the intensity of her feelings held her silent; then she glanced round anxiously towards the place where, a minute before, Fenton had stood. To her great surprise she found he had left the room, and that she and Ronald were alone together.

"Why do you look at me so strangely, darling?" he exclaimed, forcibly possessing himself of her hand, and holding it tight between both of his. "I have so longed to be with you in your sorrow—I knew how terribly you would feel it. And to think that after all, you are poor Miss Chandos' daughter, and that when I sent you here last Christmas Eve, I sent you to your rightful home!"

Vague rumours of the event that had happened at the Court on the day of the funeral had reached Ronald's ears, but he had naturally only heard a slight and garbled account of them. His anxiety to see Evelyn and learn from her own lips how the discovery of her parentage had come about, had made him defy all considerations of prudence, and venture out even when the doctor told him he ought still to be nursing his sprained foot.

There was something in her face he could not fathom. In spite of his endeavours to draw her to his breast, she held away from him, and the colour came and went rapidly in her cheeks, while her eyes were downcast beneath the rich dark fringes of her lashes.

"Ronald!" she said, at length, but in a voice that hardly rose above a whisper. "I have a confession to make to you. I should have made it when I saw you last, and when you told me you loved me, but that my courage failed me. I—oh, great Heavens!" she cried, with a sudden burst of anguish, "how can I even say the words that will separate us for ever!"

"Nothing can do that!" he returned, his eyes flashing resolutely, while in spite of her resistance, he drew her to himself, and held her in an embrace that was almost fierce. "I defy all the powers on earth to wrest you from me, darling, if your love is only half so deep and true as mine!"

For a moment she yielded to the sweetness of that caress—for one moment she felt the heavy throbs of his heart against her own, and through all her veins ran that same delicious ecstasy which had stolen her will from her on the night of Miss Chandos' death. Then, she summoned all her firmness, and wrenched herself away.

"It is not a question of love, Ronald," she said, sadly, "but of right and wrong. Ronald, do you remember the night you rescued me from myself on Waterloo Bridge?"

"Indeed, my darling, I do."

"And have you never wondered what was my motive for my leaving home?"

"You told me that you feared your uncle. Still," added Ronald, candidly, "I suspected there was some other reason which you did not tell me, but which I knew would be a good one."

"You were right. It was not only my uncle I was leaving, but—my husband!"

The words were out at last, and after they were spoken, Evelyn dared not look at her lover just at first. When she raised her eyes she saw that he had grown deadly pale, and had retreated a few paces from her.

"Your husband!" he repeated, hoarsely, "your husband!"

"My husband," she said again, steadily enough, though her heart was beating with almost suffocating rapidity. "I was married last Christmas Eve to the man I supposed my cousin—I was forced into marrying him—but rather than live with him as his wife, I left him within two hours of the ceremony, and I have never seen him since. He cared for me no more than I cared for him," she added, scornfully, "only no doubt his father had told him who I really was, and the prospect of my fortune tempted him. But oh, Ronald! do not blame me for my weakness in yielding to my uncle. I do not know whether the influence he had established over me was a mesmeric one or not, but I do know it was too strong for me to resist."

She ended with a deep sob, and leaning her arms on the mantelpiece, buried her face in them. Poor Ronald! For awhile he was silent, trying to realize the full horror of this blow that had fallen upon him. In spite of all, he had believed in her—in spite of all, he loved her still.

"But surely, Evelyn, such a marriage as this could be set aside!" he exclaimed at last.

She shook her head hopelessly.

"At any rate," he continued, in a determined voice, "I will consult a lawyer and see what can be done. I am not going to yield you without a struggle. Do you know the name of the church where this wretched ceremony took place?"

She knew neither the name of the church, nor of the clergyman, but Ronald would be able to ascertain both from Mr. Unwin, for he had taken possession of her marriage certificate.

"Then I will see Mr. Unwin first thing to-morrow morning," he declared, "and if he gives me good news I will come at once and tell it to you. If not—"

"If not," she said, sadly, flitting in the pause as he hesitated, "you must not come at all. If I owe no duty to my husband, I owe one to myself, and in future I must never see you again if I can help it." Then, yielding to a sudden uncontrollable impulse, she came up close to him where he stood on the hearthrug, and put her arms round his neck. "Good-bye, my first—my last love!" she whispered, brokenly, and almost before he had realized her words, she had vanished from the room.

For a few minutes he stood quite still, then he roused himself with a great effort, and, taking up his hat, slowly walked towards the door—like a man in a dream. Outside he found Lumley waiting to let him out, and doubtless hoping to indulge in a gossip—for the butler and Ronald Heron had been friends in the latter's schoolboy days.

"You soon frightened Mr. Fenton away, sir," observed Lumley, rubbing his hands together as if well pleased at this meritorious action on the visitor's part. "I had hardly closed the library door behind you, when out he sneaked."

"Mr. Fenton!" repeated Ronald. "Was that Mr. Fenton who was in the room when I entered?"

"To be sure it was, and very strict orders he had given that whenever you called, I was not to admit you. What his little game is I don't know, and don't care either, for its precious little time I shall call him master!"

"Surely, you are not going to leave, Lumley?"

"That's just what I am going to do, Mr. Ronald. Sir, I've lived here man and boy for upwards of thirty years, and I've never been treated as Mr. Fenton treats me. Why, from his manner, I might be the dirt under his feet! I never liked him even in the old days when he used to come with poor Mr. Brian Carrington as a visitor, and—" continued Lumley, mysteriously, "it's always been my belief that he knew more about them opals and diamonds than even Mr. Brian himself!"

Heron started. In common with the rest of the county he knew of the disappearance of the jewels, and of Brian Carrington's subsequent conviction; but he had never entertained any doubt of Carrington's guilt.



Perhaps Lumley thought he had said rather too much, for he added, quickly,—

"But that's neither here nor there. It was a mystery at the time how the jewels went, and a mystery it'll remain to the end of the chapter, I expect. But all the same Mr. Fenton's not a pleasant gentleman to live with, and it strikes me most of the servants 'ull leave the Court except Mrs. Lucy Needham," he added, with a grin, "and she's on too friendly terms with him to want to go away. They was talking together in the library for over an hour yesterday afternoon."

While Ronald was being driven back home, the remembrance of Fenton's face as he had seen it on entering the library flashed across him with curious distinctness. Where had he seen that face before? He racked his brain in a vain effort at recollection, but, try as he would, he could not bring it to mind. Then it struck him as strange that Fenton, after giving orders that he was not to be admitted to the Court, should have, as Lumley put it, "sneaked out" of the room, without making any attempt to speak to the visitor, and leaving him *à la tête* with Evelyn.

"It looked as if, for some reason or other, he was afraid," murmured Ronald, to himself, puzzling over the situation, "but why, in the name of Heaven, should he be afraid of me?"

In the morning he intended going over to see Mr. Unwin at the county town, but his foot was so much inflamed again, that the doctor insisted on his resting for another few days, and Ronald, though sadly against the grain, had to acquiesce. So instead of paying a personal visit, he wrote to Mr. Unwin, asking to be furnished with the name of the church where Evelyn was married, and of the clergyman who had performed the service.

By return of post the answer came. The name of the church was Saint Sebastian, and the name of the clergyman the Reverend Howard Thompson.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

As long as she lives Evelyn will not forget the misery of the week that followed Ronald Heron's visit, and her desperate farewell. She remained in her room as much as possible, but occasionally Dudley Fenton demanded her presence downstairs, and obedience became a necessity.

He looked sharply at her white cheeks and heavy eyes, but for some time made no remark concerning them, and after all, the two saw very little of each other, for Fenton was too much occupied in transacting business affairs connected with the Court and its revenues to pay particular attention to anything else.

"The estate is not so valuable as I thought," he observed, one afternoon, to Mr. Unwin, who had come over to obtain Evelyn's signature to some document. "How is it there are so many mortgages upon it?"

"They were raised by the last Squire—Christopher Chandos," the lawyer answered. "He cared very little for the estate, but a very great deal for his hobby of collecting precious stones, over which he wasted no end of money."

"More fool he!" muttered Fenton. "I think he must have been mad."

"Perhaps he was," returned Unwin, suavely. "I have often been struck with that idea myself. But most of us have a bee in our bonnet of some kind or other, and his bee took the somewhat feminine form of jewels. I believe the parure of opals and diamonds that he made for his niece when she was engaged to marry Lord Alerley was worth a large fortune."

A strange look came in Fenton's eyes, and his fingers interlaced almost nervously together.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, involuntarily, "if the jewels could only be found!"

"Found!" repeated the solicitor, in astonishment. "My good sir, what are you talking about? The jewels were no doubt carried out of the country years ago by Brian Carrington's confederate, while Carrington himself was enduring penal servitude for having stolen them."

"Then you believe he did steal them?"

"Of course. How else could they have vanished?"

"How indeed!" murmured Fenton; but that steady gleam of avarice had yet not died out of his eyes, and he seemed absent and preoccupied during the rest of the interview.

"I think we are going to have a snow-storm," he observed, as he rose from the table and went towards the window, while Mr. Unwin methodically tied some loose papers together with red tape. "The sky looks uncommonly like it."

"Yes; I must drive home pretty quickly, or it will overtake me. By the way, I should like to see Mrs. Marcus Fenton for a few minutes again if you would kindly ask her to come to me."

Fenton flashed a swift glance of inquiry at the solicitor, but learned nothing from Unwin's impenetrable face. On ringing the bell to make inquiries he was informed that directly after luncheon Evelyn had gone out for a walk.

"Then I suppose I must defer my business till another day. But I hope, for her own sake, that the young lady will return home pretty soon, or she will be caught in the snow," observed the lawyer, buttoning up his coat, and a few minutes later he drove off in his high-dog-cart, revolving as he went that strange glitter that had shot into Fenton's eyes at the mention of the jewels. Unwin was a sharp man, and experience had taught him to gauge human nature pretty accurately.

"I believe Fenton is up to some villainy still," he thought. "Why should he want me to hand over all those securities to him? I suppose I shall have to do so if he insists, but if I do I should never be surprised to hear he had made a bolt with them afterwards. I must try and get an interview with the heiress alone some day, but he's so precious 'cute that ten to one he'll prevent me."

Meanwhile, Evelyn was walking along the frost-bound road, unconscious of the heavy snow-filled clouds that were rolling up towards the zenith, and oblivious of the lurid and yet leaden light that filled the sky. It was not often she left the Court, but to-day an uncontrollable fit of restlessness had taken possession of her, and she longed to find herself out in the open air. She walked swiftly, too, for of late she had suffered terribly from sleepless nights, and she hoped that she might fatigue herself sufficiently to ensure a good night's rest when she got home.

As a rule, she was fond of looking at fine scenery, but to-day she noticed nothing—except, indeed, once when she had to stand aside in a narrow lane to let a waggon, piled high with bolls and misletoe, pass by. The sight sent a pang through her heart, for it brought back to her memory that last miserable day when in the foggy London streets she had seen a cart, similarly laden, go past.

Evelyn had sunk into the lowest depths of despair.

She knew, in spite of what Ronald had said, that her unhappy marriage could never be annulled, and the future stretched before her in a long vista of deepest gloom.

There was only one streak of light in her horizon—she believed that the terrible power Fenton had exercised over her in the past was at an end.

Time had strengthened her will, and she was almost sure that now it would resist his influence—almost sure, not quite, for so far Fenton had made no effort to use his mesmeristic force against her.

Suddenly she felt a thick, soft flake of snow strike her in the face, and she came to a standstill, conscious that a storm was close upon her, and looked round to see exactly where she was. She had come farther than she intended, and was now nearly three miles from the Court, and on the edge of a moor which stretched darkly away to the horizon.

The only house in sight was one called Moor End—a dilapidated old place that had once been used as a shooting-box by a nobleman, but had latterly been allowed to fall into a state of desolation.

Evelyn had heard Miss Chandos say that it had been left in charge of a caretaker and his wife, the husband being in the employ of an undertaker at the county town.

Thicker and faster the snow came whirling down, until the air seemed one mass of circling white feathers, and the moorland was quickly changed from its purpling darkness to an unsullied sheet of spotless purity.

So blinding were the flakes that Evelyn doubted whether she would be able to find her way back to the Court, and she finally decided to seek shelter at Moor End, and trust to the storm ceasing before she made any attempt to get home.

The house looked dark and forbidding enough as she rang the long bell that hung down from amongst the ivy, sending an echoing clangour through the passages, which gave it back in hollow vibrations.

She had to wait some little time before obtaining an answer to her summons; but she fancied in the meanwhile a window up above was cautiously opened, and someone looked out to see who it was demanded admittance.

When the door was finally unfastened, she found herself confronted on the threshold by a tall man, with a thick brown beard and moustache, and mournful brown eyes—a man whose appearance seemed curiously familiar to her.

"Will you kindly let me shelter here until the storm ceases?" she said, striving to remember where she had seen him before.

"Certainly; come inside," he responded briefly, and the sound of his voice gave her memory the clue it sought.

This was the same man who had been watching the Monk's Tower on the night of poor Isabel's death.

Somewhat startled at the coincidence, Evelyn followed him in, and then he said,—

"You had better come upstairs to the fire. It is too cold for you to remain here. The caretaker and her husband are both out for the day—gone to do their Christmas shopping, so there is no fire downstairs in consequence."

Evelyn hesitated; but the hesitation was only momentary.

Without further remark he led the way up the first flight of stairs, and into a long, low room, furnished in the simplest fashion with a couch, a few chairs, and a round table.

It would have been a gloomy enough apartment but for the dancing flames of a cherry-wood fire, whose logs were piled high on the hearth, and whose light was reflected ruddily in the polished oak of the furniture, and in the silvered surface of an old-fashioned mirror which hung on the wall.

"You must be half frozen," said the man, in the gentle, semi-protective manner that somehow won the young girl's confidence. "Sit down here, and warm yourself."

He drew the only armchair the room contained up to the fire, arranging the cushions as he did so.

With a few words of thanks Evelyn took the proffered seat, while her eyes glanced rather curiously round the apartment.

Behind her was a door which she could see reflected in the opposite mirror; while the two windows, framed in ivy, and looking out on the moor, were to her right.

"You were brave to venture out on such a day as this," said her host, coming and standing on the other side of the fireplace, and leaning his elbow on the carved oak shelf, while his sad brown eyes never left her face. "The storm has been threatening all the morning."

"And do you think it is likely to continue long?"

"It is impossible to say; but there is every appearance of its being pretty heavy. I would offer to drive you back to the Court—"

Evelyn started slightly. She had not said she came from the Court, so it was clear he had recognised her. Her start seemed to tell him he had been betrayed into a mistake, for he bit his lips hard, and stopped abruptly. But it was too late to retract what he had said.

"I would offer to drive you back," he continued; "but the housekeeper has driven to W—in the only vehicle this establishment possesses, and she is pretty sure not to be back for an hour or so—unless, indeed, she starts earlier, in the hope of escaping the storm. Any-

how, as soon as she comes, the dog-cart will be at your disposal."

Evelyn thanked him, and after that there was a silence. Outside the white flakes came flurrying down, while a stray piece of ivy tapped against the window like ghostly fingers.

The early December afternoon had closed in, although it was not yet four o'clock; but, as has been said before, the room was fully illuminated by the ruddy glow of the firelight.

"We shall have Christmas upon us almost directly now," observed the man at last; but Evelyn made no answer to his remark, for just then a very curious thing happened.

She was looking into the convex surface of the mirror, and by its aid she saw the door at the back of where she was sitting slowly open, and a woman's figure stand for a moment on the threshold.

One of the piled-up logs on the fire fell forward, and a vivid flame shot up from it, in whose light every object in the room was revealed with startling distinctness. It lasted only a few seconds; but in those few seconds Evelyn was able to see and recognise the features of the black-robed woman in the mirror.

It was Isabel Chandos!

With a cry that echoed all through the house the young girl sprang to her feet, and turned towards the door. The figure was gone, the door was closed, nothing but the panelled wood met her gaze. Utterly bewildered she faced her host.

"What is it?" he said kindly, though she noticed that he had grown rather pale. "What alarmed you?"

"I thought I saw someone through the mirror," she stammered, "and it took the shape of one I have loved and lost."

"In such a light as this fancy often plays us strange tricks," he returned, evasively. "If you will excuse me I will go and fetch some candles."

He left her, and she covered her face with her hands and shivered as if with cold. Had fancy, indeed, played her a trick? If so it was a most horribly vivid and realistic one.

For the first time in her life she was afraid of being alone, and it was a positive relief when her entertainer returned bringing with him a couple of wax-lights, which he set down on the table, casting at the same time an anxious glance towards her white face.

"You look rather upset," he observed. "Would you like some tea? I think I can manage it for you," and he at once put on the fire a bright copper kettle which had been standing in readiness down on the hearth, while from a corner cupboard he produced cups and saucers, and the various other accessories of a tea equipage.

Evelyn had not the courage to refuse. A cup of tea would indeed be grateful at this precise moment, and might also do something towards steadying her nerves.

"I am afraid I am giving you a good deal of trouble," she murmured, and he paused in the act of pouring hot water on the tea, and looked into her eyes steadily with his sad brown ones.

"No. Nothing that I could do for you would be a trouble. On the contrary, the idea that I am able to serve you ever so slightly fills me with pleasure. This is no empty compliment. I have lived out of the world too long to be able to pay compliments. What I say I mean—ay, every word of it."

His manner carried conviction with it, but he did not speak again for another ten minutes or so, and then it was as the front door bell pealed a loud summons through the house. Before answering he pulled aside the curtains—which he had drawn over the window—and peered cautiously out into the dusk.

"It is the caretaker and his wife come back," he observed, letting the curtains drop again, "and I see that the snow has ceased falling. It will not be for long, though, for there is yet a good deal more to come down; but perhaps you had better take advantage of the respite, and let Morris drive you home before he takes the horse out. I don't want to hurry you away, only I think the sooner you are back the better, under present circumstances."

Evelyn entirely agreed with him, and soon she

was seated in the dog-cart, well wrapped up in rug, which her former host tucked round her with a care that was quite paternal. Before she started he held her hand for a moment in his.

"Let me say one thing to you, and keep it well in your memory," he said, in too low a voice for the man who was driving to overhear. "You are not so friendless as you may suppose, I was once your father's friend, and now I am yours. Even at the Court there are those with whom your welfare is the first consideration. But if danger should threaten you—let its shape be what it will—tell Lumley, the butler, that you want to see the stranger from the Moor End, and in less than an hour I will be with you. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she returned, too astonished to say more.

"And have you sufficient confidence in me—stranger though I am to you—to promise?"

"Yes," she said, again, but in a troubled voice. Then she repeated more firmly, "Yes, I promise."

"Then farewell, and Heaven be with you!"

## CHAPTER IX.

EVELYN was fevered and excited by the events of the afternoon, and the mystery which seemed to surround her. The vision of Isabel Chandos had been so wonderfully clear that it was difficult to believe it only to be a vision. And yet what else could it be, seeing that all that remained of the last mistress of the Court now lay in the family vault at Lynbridge Church, mouldering by the side of her ancestors?

Evelyn pondered the question as she sat alone in her room that night, after the rest of the household were supposed to be soundly asleep in bed. For her own part she felt no inclination to sleep; but as she crouched low over the fire a strange fancy came to her—nothing more nor less than to look at the picture of Miss Chandos which hung in the gallery, and see if her recollection of the features tallied exactly with their painted presentment.

It was an odd idea, and if she had been more sleepy and less impulsive she might have waited till morning before attempting to carry it into effect. As it was she lighted one of her candles, for hitherto she had been sitting in the firelight—and holding it in her hand went cautiously towards the picture gallery—which, as the reader knows, was situated in the long corridor connecting the Court with the Monk's Tower.

As she went along a sudden draught of air, coming from she knew not whence, extinguished her candle, and she found herself in darkness—and darkness indeed it was, for there was no moon, and the faint radiance that made its way through the window came from the reflection of the snow outside.

Slowly enough the young girl groped her way back along the passage, but before she had taken many steps she was brought to a standstill by the sight of a faint light advancing as if to meet her from the other end of the corridor. Luckily she had ascertained her whereabouts, and knew that she was quite close to a suit of mail, behind which it would be easy enough to hide, and accordingly she crept into its friendly shelter, keeping her eyes, however, fixed all the time on that advancing light.

Nearer and nearer it came, until it was just opposite to her, and then she saw that it was carried by a cowed figure in black garments—the Monk himself.

Evelyn was surprised at the little surprise she felt as she recognized him. Perhaps she only saw what she expected; but anyhow, she did not for a moment lose her self-possession. On the contrary, all her faculties became keenly alert, and it was with a breathless curiosity rather than anxiety that she scanned the figure from head to heel, her eyes finally fixing themselves on the hand that held the light—which was not a candle, but a small antique lamp. It gave the faintest possible light, but quite enough to show Evelyn the pinkish, filbert shaped nails of the

hand that carried it, and the ring that encircled one of the fingers—a cameo of curious design and setting. She had seen that cameo many times before on the hand of Dudley Fenton.

Evelyn's heart gave a great bound. At last she had penetrated part of the mystery at any rate. The Monk was none other than Dudley Fenton, who had assumed this disguise for some sinister purpose of his own. From the fact of his continuing to wear it Evelyn came to the conclusion that that purpose was not yet fully achieved.

She determined to watch him, to follow him, but she knew it would be necessary to exercise caution, for he was not a man to be easily deceived. Still, he had probably assumed this disguise so often, and so successfully, that familiarity had bred a certain amount of contempt for the risk he ran of being discovered.

With the same slow, even footstep, he advanced to the door of the Tower, then paused, and Evelyn decided he was fitting the key in the lock. If so, the key had been well oiled, for not a sound did it make, and with an absolutely ghastly silence he disappeared. A little later, and just as Evelyn was about emerging from her concealment, a second figure came down the corridor from the direction of the Court—a woman this time, clad also in sable garments, but walking swiftly, and almost in a way that might have been called tripping. Her walk betrayed her; it was Lucy Needham.

Following exactly in the Monk's footsteps she too let herself into the tower, closing the door softly after her. But although the door was closed, it was not locked, as Evelyn presently discovered—a fact for which she was devoutly thankful for if it had been, her attempts at solving the mystery would have been brought to a hasty conclusion.

There was no light in the lowest room, clearly proving that the conspirators could not be there, but on the floor above a thin glimmer came from under the door of the room that had once been Isabel's boudoir, thus betraying their whereabouts. As it happened, the door was not quite closed—Fenton and his companion no doubt feeling themselves perfectly secure in the Tower, which was shunned more than ever by the household now, in consequence of Miss Chandos' death having taken place there.

For the first time in her life Evelyn played the part of eavesdropper—not, however, without a feeling of repugnance, for such a rôle was entirely foreign to her nature. She had no difficulty in both seeing Fenton and Lucy Needham, and hearing all that went on inside, without herself running much risk of discovery—unless, indeed, either of the worthy pair should see fit to come out suddenly, in which case discovery would be inevitable. She found out now the probable nature of the black curtain that had descended over the window when she was watching the Monk from her own room the first night she saw him appear. It was nothing more or less than a heavy piece of black cloth, fixed on to a roller which could be drawn up and down by means of a hanging cord. It was down now, in order that no glimmer of light might penetrate to the outside.

But it was the interior of the room that struck our heroine with such amazement, for it was literally pulled to pieces. The panelling of the walls was taken down, and half the floor was up, while Fenton, his monk's habit thrown into the corner, worked hard at a board, which he was clearly trying to get up also. Lucy Needham leaned against the wall watching him.

"You might as well spare yourself the pains—you will never find the jewels," she said, with a half-mocking laugh, as he paused in his laborious, but silent work, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

He returned her glance almost savagely. "I say I shall find them—I will find them!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "They are somewhere within the walls of this Tower, and I'll raise it level with the ground if I can't succeed in getting at them by any other means."

She shrugged her shoulders, her eyes all the time expressing sceptical unbelief.



"You have only one man's word to go upon, and he may have deceived you."

"He did nothing of the kind. My faith in human nature is not great, but I knew Brian Carrington as it is seldom given to one man to know another, and I am perfectly certain that he was as incapable of telling a lie as he was of stealing the jewels. Besides, I was aware of a fact that no one else knew, that might have thrown a considerable degree of light on the mystery, if I had given evidence of it at the trial."

"Which you did not do," she put in, tranquilly, and he smiled.

"No, I kept it to myself. Brian had stolen from me the only woman I ever cared for—except yourself, of course, Lucy!—and I owed him a debt which I was glad enough to pay by looking on while he was sentenced to penal servitude. If the jury had known that under the strain of any undue excitement Carrington was given to walking in his sleep they might have come to the same conclusion as I did—namely, that his anxiety about the jewels committed to his charge had brought on a fit of somnambulism, and he had hidden them in some secure hiding place, the site of which in his waking hours, he forgot."

"That hiding-place need not necessarily be in this Tower."

"Oh, yes, it need, for at the trial old Christopher Chandos swore that after leaving the gems in his nephew's charge he determined to make assurance doubly sure, and so locked the door leading into the corridor, thus preventing anyone from either entering or leaving the Tower. That puts the matter in a nutshell, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does," admitted the woman, grudgingly; "but if that is the case you ought to have begun your search years ago."

"I know I ought."

"Why didn't you, then?"

"For a very sufficient reason. I don't know that I need hesitate to tell you, for we have shared a good many secrets together, haven't we? And a confession of the truth can do me no special harm now. Well then, being young and foolish in those days, I had made a little mistake, and used Colonel Heron's name—the uncle of Ronald Heron—on a cheque, which he declined to honour. He did not prosecute me, for the sake of the Chandos's, but he threatened to do so unless I left England, and he declared he would if I ventured into this country again. He was quite capable of keeping his word too, so you see, my dear Lucy, that it was a very natural discretion that kept me abroad for so long, and that induced me to change my name when I finally came back to my native country, rather more than twelve months ago. But all through my exile I was haunted by the thought of these jewels, and the fortune they meant to anyone lucky enough to find them, and it was for the purpose of reconnoitring and informing me generally how matters stood that I sent you down here to try for a situation as Miss Chandos's maid. I knew how quick and clever you were, my dear."

"At any rate, I managed to get what you wanted—a duplicate of the key of the Tower door," retorted she, sharply. "I don't know what you would have done without it."

"Oh, I should have managed somehow. I am a person of expedients, and I would remind you that you were a precious long time before you succeeded in obtaining it."

"That was because Miss Chandos had hidden it away in a secret drawer in her wardrobe, and I could not find it."

"All right, Lucy, you needn't get in a temper over it. Probably if you had found it before, I might not have had the chance of using it," he returned, soothingly. "I should have been very shy of coming into this neighbourhood during Colonel Heron's life, but he was kind enough to die at a very convenient moment, and I was not afraid of anyone else recognising me; even if they had, they could have done me no harm. Besides, it's you I have to thank for making me my monk's habit—it was a capital idea of yours to

take advantage of that old story of the monk's ghost haunting the tower."

"Yes, but that girl Evelyn nearly spoilt everything by bringing Miss Chandos here," Lucy Needham observed, resentfully. "That last night she came—"

Fenton interrupted her quickly. A ghastly pallor had overspread his features.

"Don't talk of that!" he exclaimed. "Isabel's cry is ringing in my ears even yet, and I shall never forget her face as she fell forward—"

As these words caught her ear, the listener outside had much ado to prevent an exclamation of horror escaping her lips. What did this confession on Fenton's part mean, if not that he had some share in Miss Chandos's death?

For a minute her head swam, and a mist rose before her eyes. The first words she heard afterwards were spoken by Lucy Needham.

"Well," she was saying, "it strikes me, as I said before, that you have pretty well exhausted this room. You have had the walls down, and the flooring up, so only the ceiling remains."

She laughed sardonically. In spite of all Fenton's arguments she could not bring herself to believe that his search would ever be successful.

"And when I have finished with this room, and not found anything, I shall begin on the room below," Fenton replied, stolidly. "I am playing for high stakes, and I literally won't leave a stone unturned in my effort to compel success. As you saw, there were two or three secret hiding-places in these panels, and the jewels might have been stowed away in any one of them."

"Only they were not!"

Not in the least discouraged by her sneers, Fenton had risen to his feet, and was looking up at the ceiling in a contemplative manner. We have mentioned before that this ceiling was of polished oak, enriched with quaint carvings of fruit and flowers. From the central group of carving depended the chandelier of Venetian glass which Brian Carrington had brought back with him from Italy as a present to Isabel. It was still covered with a thick film of feathery dust, which concealed the richness of its hues, but could not altogether disguise its graceful design.

"We found a secret receptacle amongst the carvings of the mantelpiece, why not another in the carvings of the ceiling?" Fenton murmured, more to himself than his companion. "At any rate I'll try it, but that chandelier must come down before anything else can be done."

"It's a pretty thing," observed Lucy Needham, following his glance—and she was right.

It was in the shape of a vase of classic design, filled with flowers which trailed over its sides, their cups forming scones for candles. In order to reach it Fenton had to stand on a chair placed on a table, but even then he was not quite high enough to execute his task very skilfully—although, in effect, the achievement was not a specially difficult one, as the chandelier depended from slender chains which ended in a hook, and this hook was passed through a ring screwed into the centre of the carving.

A crash—an exclamation of fierce impatience from Fenton, and the chandelier lay on the floor dashed into a hundred fragments. How the accident happened it is impossible to say, unless its weight was greater than Fenton had been prepared for, and it had slipped out of his grasp in consequence. Anyhow, there it lay, while Lucy Needham, who had been holding the lamp as high as she could in order to give her companion as much light as possible, now bent over the débris with an expression of consternation in her eyes that immediately changed to one of uncontrollable exultation.

"Dudley!" she cried, in a shrill whisper, "after all, you were right and I was wrong. The vase of the chandelier was hollow, and the jewels were inside. Look—there they are!"

With one trembling finger she pointed downwards, and the rays of the lamp flashed and scintillated on the starry glitter of diamonds, and lost itself in the shifting radiance of iridescent opals—opals that changed their colour with each ray of light—opals worth a king's ransom.

At last the mystery of the Monk's room was solved!

## CHAPTER X.

EVELYN stole back to her room, knowing that now his search was over Dudley Fenton would lose no time in leaving the Tower. Her brain was in a tumult; she felt as if she had been the witness of some exciting drama, in whose crisis her own fortunes were bound up.

And was not this the case? Had not the father she had neither known nor seen been accused of a crime of which he was innocent, and was it not his daughter's duty to see that his memory was wiped "clear of stain?"

For twenty years the jewels had lain secure in their hiding-place, where, there could be no doubt, he himself had placed them while under the influence of somnambulism, and now at last they had been brought to light.

But Evelyn knew that even yet she had a difficult task before her. A tigress would not fight for her young with more fierceness than Fenton for the jewels which he had hunted for with such patience and energy. Probably he would lose no time in taking them out of the country, and then breaking them up from their setting, and by disposing of each stone singly, run no risk of detection.

Evelyn pondered on her best course of action; for she was determined to outwit Fenton if possible, and clear her father's name. Finally, she decided that first thing in the morning she would send for Mr. Unwin. He was an honest man, and clever enough to match his wits against Fenton's, and he would know what steps to take in the matter.

The morning dawned—such a morning as December seldom sees. The snow lay on the earth in a widespread mantle of virginal purity, crusting the trees with its sparkling burden of whiteness, and turning the gardens into a most exquisite fairyland. The sky was free from cloud and of a deep azure, while the pale wintry sunshine shone over all, and the keen air was crisp and exhilarating as draughts of champagne.

As Evelyn looked out of her window—across which King Frost had traced a wonderful lacy network, already beginning to melt under the sun's rays—she remembered that it was Christmas Eve, the anniversary of her wedding day!

She turned away with an involuntary sigh, and a brave effort to crush in her heart those miserable regrets that rose up like a black pall between her and the sunshine. She would not think of herself and her own wasted life, but of that other life that had also been wasted, but which should at last be free from the stigma that had rested on it for so long.

She dared not send her message to the solicitor from the Court for fear of its being intercepted by Fenton; but directly after breakfast she put on the fur cloak that had been one of Isabel Chandos's last gifts to her, and set out for the village post-office—which was the telegraph office as well. Here she wrote out a few lines, begging Mr. Unwin to come to her without delay, and to wire back what time she might expect him; and then she sat down inside the office to await the answer. It came in about half an hour, and was despatched by one of the clerks in Mr. Unwin's office, who said that the lawyer had gone to see a client who was ill in a neighbouring county, and would not be back till evening.

Poor Evelyn! This was a terrible disappointment, but she quickly made up her mind that failing Mr. Unwin, she must apply to Ronald Heron.

For reasons that we know of, she was loath to do this, but she decided that the situation in which she found herself would be sufficient excuse for breaking her former determination, and she accordingly wrote a brief note, asking the young man to come to the post-office, as she wished to consult him on very important business.

Alas! the little telegraph boy whom she despatched with this epistle, returned with the news that Mr. Ronald Heron had gone to London the day before; so Evelyn was left once more to

her own resources, and by this time she had grown well-nigh desperate.

Suddenly she bethought herself of her host of the Moor End. He had told her to apply to him if she was in any sort of trouble, and, more than this, he had looked fully capable of bestowing the help he promised. Yes, she would go to him. It was an unconventional thing for her to do—a desperate measure indeed, but then it must be remembered that her need was also desperate.

"Do you think," she said to the woman at the post-office, who was regarding her with feelings of very lively curiosity, "I could get some sort of vehicle to take me to the Moor End Farm?"

"Certainly, miss. You could get a cab from the inn next door but one. Jimmy shall order it for you, if you like."

Jimmy—who was the son of the house as well as the Mercury of telegrams—was delighted to execute this commission; it was indeed a red-letter day in Jimmy's calendar, for Evelyn bestowed a whole five-shilling-piece on him for his services, and Jimmy would not in consequence have changed places with an Emperor on that special Christmas Eve.

The fly, after some delay, appeared, and Evelyn took her place inside it. A good deal of the morning had already been wasted in waiting for replies to her messages, and the young girl saw, on consulting her watch, that it was now twelve o'clock.

A very fever of impatience consumed her, and it seemed to her that never had horse crawled at such a snail's pace as did the wretched quadruped harnessed to the vehicle which conveyed her across the moor that morning.

She had gauged Fenton's character pretty accurately: she knew that he was not only clever and unscrupulous, but that he was also a man who, if there was a thing to be done, did it without delay—he never lost an opportunity.

Likely enough he would leave the Court that very day, taking the jewels with him, and when they were once out of reach he could snap his fingers at Evelyn; and declare that what she had seen in the Monk's Tower was only a figment of her imagination.

At last the Moor End was reached, and once again the young girl pulled the hanging bell and woke up the echoes of the house. The door was opened by a clean, tidy-looking woman, who was the housekeeper; but before she had time to ask her visitor's business, the person of whom Evelyn was in search appeared on the scene, and at once led her upstairs to the room where she had tea the preceding afternoon.

"You are in trouble!" he exclaimed, looking earnestly into her face, and at the same time taking off her gloves, and beginning to chafe her hands, which were blue with cold. "What has happened?"

He asked it in such a perfectly natural tone, and seemed to take the fact of her coming to him so much for granted, that Evelyn felt all her doubts and hesitations melt away like dew in the sunlight.

In few words, and as succinctly as possible, she related the events of the previous night, but she was totally unprepared for the effect her narrative produced.

The man before her trembled violently, a deadly pallor overspread his face, and as she finished speaking he sank into a chair, letting his head fall on his folded arms, while words that seemed like a prayer of thanksgiving burst involuntarily from his lips.

Then he rose, and stood once more before her, an impressive solemnity in his eyes.

"My dear," he said, "have you ever heard this line?"

"The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small."

I have sometimes been ready to doubt Providence, but I do so no longer, for I myself have seen its deep and mysterious workings. Do you think, Evelyn, you can bear a surprise?"

"I have borne so many already," she returned, with a sad smile, "that it doesn't seem to me as if anything could ever surprise me much again."

(Continued on page 236.)

## TROOPER JACKSON.

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TRAMP! tramp! clink! clink! and the good people of Canterbury who were awake pulled aside their blinds, and looked out in the early morning sunlight on the troops who were marching through their midst to the station, on the first stage of their journey to India.

It was no new sight. Every year the drafts go out, and there is the same excitement, the same marching men, some pleased and elated, some discontented and downcast.

Some are taking their wives with them. The greater proportion of those that are blessed with partners are leaving them behind, and many of these, especially those whom the authorities do not acknowledge because they are married without leave, elect to come as far with their liege lords as can possibly be permitted, and hang on to them weeping and dishevelled, and for the most part terribly untidy and by no means a credit to the British Army.

And the band plays "The girl I left behind me," and they hardly realise what a terrible significance that little tune has for them, and "Auld lang syne," and they weep aloud, and bemoan themselves to the lookers on, and the station is reached, and the men march in, and it is all over; the women may go back to their desolate homes, and make what they can of their solitary lives.

There was a little more excitement than usual about this particular exodus. There was a scent of trouble in the air in the East, and it was quite possible that there might be fighting in store for these departing heroes.

The Colonel's son was with them, too, and all the barracks knew how dearly the stern old martinet loved his boy.

He was a widower, and his niece lived with him; and everybody thought that Captain Ferrars would marry Miss Verschoyle. He was a long time making up his mind the gossips thought, and made up a pretty little story in their own minds about the cause of Miss Verschoyle's paleness and delicacy of constitution; it was unrequited love, of course, and the handsome captain was the cause of it.

They little knew Edith Verschoyle, who invented these idle stories. Her good-looking cousin was the last man she would have thought of marrying, even if her heart had not been full of some one else. She had a story, and a sad one, this sweet-faced, fragile-looking girl, who went with her uncle to the early departure of the troops.

"Of course I am going to get up," she said the night before, when at a very late, or rather early hour she bade her uncle and cousin good night, and prepared to get what sleep she might in the hum of excitement that pervaded the old barracks. "I am going to see the very last of Captain Ferrars. He will be General maybe before he comes back to England. I want to take the very last report to Amy. Tell her how he looked at the very instant the train started. Are you not sorry you are not going to Portsmouth, uncle dear?"

"No, child," said the Colonel, hastily. The parting with his son was a wrench he could not talk about, "it is better to say good-bye here. I am an old fool, and I don't want to make Frank look ridiculous."

"You couldn't do that, dear," the girl said, stealing her hand into that of the old man, who pressed it with a fatherly clasp. "You wouldn't let any one see that you cared a tiny mite, and you would probably save (oh, you needn't look at me like that, I've heard you do it) at some unfortunate man that had a strap half an inch awry, and relieve your feelings in that way, Frank would understand, but the men would think you a stony-hearted Brutus instead of the dearest old father that ever lived."

"Discipline must be maintained, child," said the Colonel, with a smile, "and tears are no part of it. A soldier's jacket has no place for a pocket handkerchief."

"No," said Edith, demurely. "We used to have an old volume of *Punch* at home that said 'the British flag should be the only pocket-hand-

kerchief of the soldier.' On the whole, it is better to stay at home if you feel like crying."

"Don't you cry at the station, then, and die, grace me," Colonel Ferrars said, as he kissed her, with lips that were tremulous in spite of himself; and Edith went to her own room and did her crying "on the quiet," as she confessed afterwards, for she was very fond of her cousin, and the barracks would seem very different without his cheery voice and the sound of his bright step going in and out of his father's quarters.

It was her home now. She had lost her father when she was a child, and her mother had died some two years before the date of our story, and Mrs. Verschoyle's brother—Colonel Ferrars—had at once offered his orphan niece a home.

"Let her come to me," he said, warmly. "I want someone to look after me, and there's no danger for her. No one will take her away from me."

"No," Mrs. Verschoyle said. "She will be quite safe, my poor child. Edward, promise me one thing before it is too late."

"Anything, dear, that I can do."

"Promise me that you will take up my child's cause, and seek out and punish."

"Yes, dear, yes," the Colonel replied. "Be sure I will. If I can ever get a clue that man shall meet with his deserts; but we have none, not the shadow of a hint. I think he must be dead."

"No; he is not dead—I know it—I feel it. He is here in this lower world still. Perhaps I shall know. Perhaps I shall understand where I am going why the innocent are made to suffer so."

He soothed her and caressed her, and before many hours were over he had closed her eyes and taken his piece to his heart, with loving promises that she should never want a home while he lived. She had been with him over two years now, and had only just returned from a somewhat lengthened visit to a relative in the Isle of Wight. She was universally beloved in the barracks. The women and children with whom she came in contact almost worshipped her, and there was not a man about the place from the Major downwards who would not have done anything to serve her. All the young officers were in love with her to a man; but somehow they felt there was no chance for them. No one knew what the story was that lay behind the weary look in the sweet eyes, and frequent quiver of the perfect lips; but that there was one, everyone who saw Edith Verschoyle felt sure. She had come to Canterbury from a distant part of the country, and no one had ever heard of her till the Colonel introduced her as his niece, so that no hint of her history had reached Canterbury.

There is very little sleep in barracks on the eve of a departure for India; considerable license is allowed, and the men receive visitors; and there is much singing and shouting and bidding of good-bye and telling of amazing tales of former experiences by the old hands and wondering, awe-stricken listening from the younger ones, to whom the prospect of the change is generally very acceptable. In the room of the—th Lancers talk ran high. Most of the men were going out to their regiment, than at Senkote.

"I wish we had Ferrars for our Captain instead of that devil Vere," one of the men said. "The 11th fellows have always a good time of it. His being the Colonel's son makes a heap of difference; and that pretty Miss Verschoyle—what's that?"

"I beg your pardon, mate. I slipped. Did it hit you?"

A soldier carrying a can which was called for to get more beer, had slipped or stumbled, and the empty utensil had flown from his grasp and hit the speaker pretty smartly on the head.

"Well, yes it did, hard enough to remind me that I am thirsty. Don't look so scared, man, I'm not hurt, are you?"

"No," the soldier replied, but his face was ashen white, and he shook all over. "I think I must have gone faint or something of that sort; this room is hot. Were you talking to me when I hit you?"

"No. I forget what I was saying."



"Something about Miss Verschoyle," suggested another man.

"Oh yes, I remember," the first speaker said. "I was talking about the Captain. I was only going to say that Miss Verschoyle helps a lot to make things go smooth in the 11th's room. She's made the women decent and civil tongued, and that's what no one could ever do before. That old mother Davis is enough to keep a whole barracks on the broil."

"Who is Miss Verschoyle?"

The man who had dropped the can turned his face to the speaker as he asked the question. It was very white still.

"The Colonel's niece; you haven't seen her, of course. She only came back to barracks yesterday. She's been away somewhere all the time you have been here. She's a pretty creature."

"I have missed a treat then. I shall not see her now."

"Not likely; she'll hardly get up to see us off. Here's her very good health, anyway," taking a mighty pull at the beer that was brought in as he spoke, "and good luck to her wherever she goes."

The other man made no answer. He was a silent fellow; his comrades could never get what they called any fun out of him; he was a man who seldom smiled, and rarely spoke. He had come to the 11th Lancers by exchange from another regiment and was going out to India at his own earnest request. He was a good soldier with nothing against him during the whole of his service, some three years, or rather more now, and his companions liked him, though they regarded him with a certain amount of suspicion simply because they knew nothing about him.

They were an outspoken lot, as a rule, they knew why most of their comrades had enlisted; how this one had been jilted, and that one was starving, and the other had a little difficulty with the police, and all the hundred reasons that go to make up the strength of our army, but of John Jackson they knew positively nothing.

He never got drunk or made trouble of any sort, and he was always ready to lend a helping hand to any one who needed it. He was always good-natured to recruits, he pitied the big, awkward lads, who, with every will in the world to do the best they can, find it impossible, because they do not know how, and cannot understand the rough orders and bitter execrations of their instructors.

More than one lad, goaded almost to madness or suicide by the anxiety of his first few months as a soldier, had things made smooth for him by kindly hints and practical illustrations of how and why; and though he had only been a short time at Canterbury, his going was regretted.

"The Colonel's niece," he said to himself. "Colonel Ferrars; ah! well, I am going to India; John Jackson, one of the rank and file. I shall never come back. If I live, there is a wide field there for nameless men, and plenty of room for a grave."

He went out and strolled about, for there was no going to bed that night, and rejoined his companions when they were mustering for the last time on English ground.

"Here they come, uncle! oh, why does the band play that?" said Edith, as the sad, sweet notes of "Home, sweet Home," floated towards them as they stood on the platform with a privileged few, and heard the murmur of the crowd outside, where soba mingled with the chatter. "There's Frank, he looks splendid, dear fellow!"

There was a hurried hand-clasp, as the young captain came up and joined them for a minute, and then all was bustle and the tramp of feet, as the troops marched in, and went to their respective carriages.

The 11th Lancers were last, and they one and all, with one exception, saluted the Colonel as they went by.

John Jackson walked like a man in a dream, and did not seem to see anything; the man next him nudged his elbow.

"The Colonel and Miss Verschoyle," he said, but the opportunity was gone; they had reached the door of their compartment and the oppor-

tunity was gone, John Jackson did not even turn his head.

Colonel Ferrars looked more of a martinet than ever as the carriage doors slammed, and with a ringing cheer from the men answered by a wild shout from outside, the train moved slowly off. He looked as if he thought farewells and feelings, and "sentiment" of every sort, all nonsense; and all the while his heart was so full that he could have broken down and blubbered like any of the fashion women that were displaying their feelings outside.

"It is all over child," he said, "we had better go back and have some breakfast. Why Edith, my dear, what is it? Here Draycott," as a tall, handsome young fellow came, "she's faint, I think; I was a fool to let her come out—women are sentimental, though I didn't think she was."

Edith was stumbling blindly forward like some one suddenly in darkness, and would have fallen but for the timely assistance of the young officer's hand. Her face was as white as marble, and her eyes looked blank and dim. They took her to the carriage, and the Colonel got in beside her. She had not fainted, and was able to thank Lieutenant Draycott for his assistance, but she was very white, and trembled from head to foot. Her uncle did not ask her any questions till they reached home; then she sank into a chair as if all her strength had suddenly gone.

"What is it dear?" he said, gently, when they were alone. "Did anything frighten you?"

"I don't know—I am going mad, I think—Uncle, he is there! amongst those men who have gone away to-day."

"He—dear—who?"

"He—my Lionel—my darling. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do? He looked straight into my face; he has been here, near me, and I have not known it—you have power, you can fetch him back!"

She burst into hysterical tears, and Colonel Ferrars took her hand and bent over her.

"Dear you have been mistaken," he said. "It was some chance likeness we should have known if that countenance had been anywhere about—some of us would have seen him."

"Don't call him that, uncle—he was never anything but good and true—whatever the mystery of his disappearance may have been, and we shall never know till we all meet on the other side; there's neither sin nor shame of his making. Oh, how shall we find out?"

"Quite easily, my darling; tell me just how and where you fancied you saw him."

"It was with the 11th Lancers—the very last troop to come to the station, he was amongst them, dressed like them—a common soldier. I thought my eyes were deceiving me, but as the train moved off he looked at me again with loving, wistful eyes, as if he were longing to speak, and then it was all over; and he was gone, and all was dark and cold!"

"We will soon find out exactly who the Lancers were who have gone," the Colonel said. "I am afraid there is no chance of your finding that man so easily. Whatever prompted his basely conduct, he would hardly run the risk of coming so near you as this."

"But suppose he did not know; soldiers cannot go where they please. It was Lionel, uncle; my heart could not deceive me."

Colonel Ferrars was troubled. He had hoped that in the brightness and quiet of her life with him his niece was beginning to forget the sorrow that had blighted her life, and made the world a blank for her, as far as love and lovers were concerned. People wondered at her gentle gravity and the shadow that always seemed to hang over her. They did not know—how should they?—that she was that most forlorn of all Heaven's creatures—a forsaken wife; that on the brightness that was around the threshold of her life a black shadow had fallen that no one could lift or see through. It was even so. She was married; and within two hours of her turning away from the altar, the happiest bride that ever the sun shone on, her husband had gone out of her life for ever, no one knew where!

The wedding had been in the afternoon, and they had been delighted at their exemption from

the infliction of the old-fashioned wedding breakfast, with its long, dreary sitting and interminable formalities. The entertainment had been social, and they had moved about amongst their guests till the time came for them to go away. Edith had gone to get ready, her mother attending her, and had come down to say farewell to those who clustered about her, and to find—nothing. There was no bridegroom—Lionel Carruthers had vanished as completely as if he had never existed; and from that hour to this, in which his wife sat weeping in her uncle's study, he had never been heard of.

There was absolutely no clue. All that his valet could tell was that he had been asked to tell his master that a gentleman urgently desired to speak to him—*must* do so, the message ran, or he would wait for him and speak to him at the door. Beyond that he fancied that Mr. Carruthers looked a little pale as he listened to the message, the valet saw no signs of any agitation. His master had remarked that he did not wait any one bothering him on the doorstep—there was enough fuss without that—and had gone out. That was positively all he knew.

The lawyers could tell nothing. All Mr. Carruthers's money matters were in perfect order. He was not a rich man, but he had sufficient to live comfortably upon, and he had settled a fair sum upon his wife, for her absolute use. Altogether the prospects of the young couple were very good. There was no money trouble, and the bridegroom had borne, so far as was known, a stainless name. There was no awkward scandal to be hushed up on his marriage, as sometimes happens; no woman had entered into his life, so his friends and his valet said, and the mystery was black and unfathomable. The lawyers advertised and searched, and Edith Verschoyle's mother took her daughter to her heart, and comforted her as best she could. They would have none of the money that was settled on the sorrowing bride, or hold any communication with his solicitors—when he was found, and chose to explain, new arrangements could be made.

Mrs. Verschoyle and her friends believed that he had absconded for some shameful reason. Edith alone declared that he had been decoyed away, and that he was either dead or detained somewhere against his will—he loved her, and she trusted in his love. But time went on, and no tidings came. If Lionel Carruthers were alive, he made no sign; and the hope died out of his bride's heart and the sunshine out of her life, and for a time it seemed as if she were going to seek for him in the unknown. Time wore on, and youth and strength asserted themselves, and Edith came back to health again by slow degrees, but never to her former bright cheerfulness. Her mother's death, which she bewailed with passionate sorrow was really a good thing for her; Mrs. Verschoyle was one of those well meaning women who can never let a thing go, and she kept up her anger against the missing man, and her lamentations over her daughter's broken life, till there were times when Edith was thankful to get away from home and lay her griefs to rest for a little while.

And now the grief had broken out afresh, and there did not seem any way of helping her, she had seen a fancied likeness to her recant husband in one of the troopers who had gone away, and it had brought all that terrible past back with fresh vehemence. Colonel Ferrars made all inquiries about the Lancers who had gone with the drafts, but the names told him nothing, there were three amongst them who had been out but a short time in the depot, and his description of the man he wanted to find was vague, to say the least of it. He had only seen Edith's husband twice in his life, and could recollect nothing of him, except that he was a sufficiently handsome young fellow with bright honest eyes and a fine erect bearing, that made the military martinet think it was a pity he was not a soldier.

He knew the Colonel in command of the 11th Lancers at Seakote, and he wrote to him telling him exactly what had occurred, and begging him to find out, if possible, the antecedents of the three men whose names he gave him—one of whom it must have been that was so like Lionel

Carruthers. Colonel Vane was a north countryman, and knew all about "The Verschoyle-Carruthers mystery," as the papers had called it at the time.

"He will find out all about those three fellows," Colonel Ferrars said to his niece, when he had despatched his letter, "and now cheer up, my pet, if he is above ground we'll find him. And I should like to horsewhip him when I do see him," he added, *sotto voce*. "I think I should try, for as old as I am—"

There was sadness in many of the old barrack-rooms at Canterbury that day of exodus, there were wives who had to leave little homes that were wanted for more fortunate women, whose husbands had not had to go to India, there were men who sorely missed comrades for whom they had an affection, and whom they might never see again, and there was the general up-etting caused by sudden removal, and the incoming of fresh men who had to get accustomed to the old place and its ways. There was no change in the rooms of the Regimental S.M., he was a fine soldier and truly the right hand of the Colonel and the Adjutant.

"I thought I shouldn't like Trench when he first came," the Colonel said to his niece one day. "There was some thing odd about both him and his wife to my fancy, but he's the best 'regimental' I have ever seen, and the woman's worth her weight in gold, if only as an example to that crew up at the quarters."

Sergeant-Major Trench was indeed a trustworthy and good officer, and he had been at the dépôt for something over three years. He had obtained the post through some influence that had been brought about to bear on the Colonel of his own regiment, and he knew that he was likely to keep it. His face looked as if there was a story in it, and, indeed, amongst his former comrades all sorts of tales were rife about his married life, and the pretty girl whom some of them remembered very well. He was known to be married, but Mrs. Trench was not seen in barracks. It was understood that all his times of leave, and as much as he could get in any way, were spent with his wife, but he never spoke of her, or answered any questions about her. She did not like barracks, was all that he ever vouchsafed to explain, and his comrades who saw him daily never suspected that his outward calmness and gravity hid a grief that was eating into his heart, and making his genial nature hard and bitter in spite of himself.

The wife he so loved and trusted had left him, lured away by the glitter of jewels and fine clothes, and the specious flattery of a false tongue. No one at Canterbury knew the history of these two, or that the pale, sad-eyed woman whose very presence in the place was like a benediction in its usefulness, and quiet unselfishness, had been rescued by the man she had betrayed from the consequences of her sin, and brought back to his home to atone as far as might be, for the misery she had wrought.

That she was a good wife in the general acceptance of the term no one could doubt, there were no cleaner quarters in the place, and no man more nicely kept, as far as a woman's hands could do it. No one ever heard them quarrel, or even disagree with the little tiffs that are patent to every one, and blow over as soon as they arise, the sergeant's face was always grave and sad; he looked like a man who had forgotten how to smile, and in his wife's pallid face there was an expression of patient suffering, and hopeless sadness, that went to every heart. It was the face of one on whom the hand of death was resting, for whom there was nothing in this world but to wait. It was so, and she knew it; she might live a few years longer, but not many, when her forgiving husband found her and brought her back to him, she was already doomed, but his care and nursing had well nigh re-tored her to safety and health. But the seeds of disease had taken too deep a root, and within the last few months she had come to know that her career on earth was well-nigh ended.

She and the sergeant had been amongst the privileged few who had been allowed to go inside the station when the troops left, his duty called

him there, and he had found a place for her. When the train had moved out he went to her and found her standing staring after it with wild eyes, clutching a pillar to save herself from falling.

"Mary!" he exclaimed, "What is the matter? Are you ill? Try and speak to me."

"Take me home, Jem," was all she could gasp out, and he drew her out into the air that she might recover herself a little.

She did so by a mighty effort, and looked at him with a pitiful sadness in her face.

"Was it a warning, do you think?" she said in a low tone; "Am I going to die—it is the second time."

Her husband did not know in the least what she was talking about, but he soothed and cheered her and took her home as quickly as he could. Then he made her sit down in his own easy chair, and made her a cup of tea as deftly as a woman.

"You are tired and over-wrought my girl," he said. "You have been working for other people till you have done yourself up."

When she was calmer he asked her again what had frightened her, and she covered her face with her hands and burst into bitter weeping.

"Am I never to forget!" she wailed, "Is there no mercy?"

It had to do with that awful past then, this trouble of her's, and her husband's face grew hard and set, and a steely light came into his eyes as he looked at her.

"Tell me," he said in a low tone, "is it anything I don't know about?"

"No Jem, no, as I am a dying woman—and I know that I am that; it is nothing new: I have seen a dead man, that is all."

"Who?"

"The man whose life I spoiled. The bright young fellow that I let marry me when, oh! I don't ask you any more, Jem,—you know,—whose cup of happiness I dashed from his lips on his wedding morning with the miserable lie that I, his wife was alive! He was honest, and thought me dead—that he was free to take a good girl to his heart, and in the midst of his heaven of happiness and joy, I faced him with that lie and killed him! I have seen his ghost, Jem,—here,—twice—once on the parade ground and now this morning at the station. It went to the train with the men, and looked at me out of the window of the last carriage of all. It came to warn me, Jem; and it cannot atone. It is too late! too late!"

There was universal sorrow and sympathy all through the dépôt that evening, when it was rumoured that Mrs. Trench was very ill indeed. The doctor had been twice to her quarters to see her, and looked very grave when he was asked how she was.

He feared the worst, even if she rallied from this attack it would only be a question of a few weeks he thought, she was worn out, she was delicious, and in a high fever.

"I will go and see her," Edith Verschoyle said, when she heard the report, but the doctor, with whom she was a great favourite, begged her to defer her visit until he was quite sure that there was no infection.

There was none, poor Mary Trench was more mentally than bodily ill, and the doctor had caught the meaning of some of her disconnected ravings and put them together, coming to the conclusion that Miss Verschoyle should be about the last person to stand by her bedside and listen to them.

He had a long talk with Sergeant Trench, and after morning parade the next day the Colonel sent for the sergeant, and was closeted with him for over an hour in his own private room, to the curiosity and amazement of the whole dépôt.

What could be going to happen? men asked one another, and guilty consciences waked up and made their owners very uncomfortable for a little while, but nothing came of it, no one was arrested, and no alterations made in anything; the business was purely private.

Mrs. Trench was said to be a little better, and the Colonel's orderly reported having heard a few astonishing words as Trench left his master's presence.

Colonel Ferrars had held out his hand and the

other had taken it, and then the Colonel had said,—

"You are an honour to our common manhood, Trench. If there were more like you in the world it would be a better place for most of us."

And the sergeant had rubbed his glove across his eyes hurriedly, and gone downstairs, and been more gruff than usual for the next half-hour. There was "something up," but what that something was no one could guess.

Miss Verschoyle appeared to be ill as well as Mrs. Trench, who presently recovered sufficiently to sit up and creep about her rooms again, but would never be the useful woman she had been again. No one thought of connecting the two women together in any way. Edith Verschoyle had no idea that the woman who had caused all the sorrow of her life was so near at hand, and the repentant wife of the regimental sergeant-major never guessed that the gentle girl with the sad eyes, who was so good to everyone she came across, was the bride whose wedding-day she had spoiled, and whose life's happiness she had wrecked with a lie.

During her career of infamy and recklessness after she had been flung aside by the man who had first tempted her away, she had fallen in with Lionel Carruthers. Like a dozen other young fellows, he had been captivated by her beauty, which, even now in her weakness and repentance, was remarkable, and he had fallen a ready victim to her wiles. He was honourable and proposed to marry her. She laughed at him at first, but after awhile, prompted by Heaven knows what devilish instinct, she consented, and they were made man and wife at a convenient registrar's office. It was a binding marriage for aught he knew, and when he discovered his wife's true character, and fled in disgust from her and her unhallowed pleasures and surroundings, it was with the knowledge that he had wrecked his life and hung a chain round his neck that he could never get rid of.

Then came news of her death, proof, as it seemed to him, and he was free—free to love and marry the girl of his choice, and to be summoned from her side on his wedding-day, to stand face to face with the ghost of his bitter past.

No wonder that he fled from all who had known him and loved him—or that in his bitter agony he thought of nothing but hiding himself from all the world. Nearly everyone believed him dead. Mary Trench, when she was found by her husband and brought back to the home she had disgraced, thought she had proof that it was so; she had seen and recognized a body taken from the river, and the sight of it had well-nigh killed her. She felt quite sure now his ghost had come to call her, and her race was run.

Colonel Ferrars had a different opinion, somehow; he did not believe in ghosts, and he wrote to his son in India a long letter that made Captain Ferrars open his eyes very wide, and whistle much to himself, and then ask for leave of absence to visit another regiment on urgent business—the 1st Lancers, stationed at Sealkote.

"Is it a bad accident, Major? I hope not."

It was Frank Ferrars who spoke, standing by the side of the major of the 11th. He had only arrived that day, and during a parade, which he had been watching, a trooper's horse had reared and fallen back upon his rider. No one seemed to know how it came about, something had startled either horse or man, or both; there was no reason for such a catastrophe, but the men on either side of the one who had fallen, said that he must have been ill, that he reeled in his saddle as if he were drunk, and then fell, the horse rearing and falling also.

Inquiring again later on, the injured man was reported to be much the same; he had not recovered his senses and was delirious, his head was injured. But the doctor did not think him in absolute danger.

"It is 'the old, old story,' I suspect," the medical officer said, talking about him over the mess-table, "a false name and a love affair."

"What makes you think that?" asked Frank Ferrars.

"He is not just the type of a common soldier; he is raving and doubts his identity; he declined



most emphatically just now to be Trooper Jackson; says he is Lionel Carruthers—I remember the name, for I have heard it somewhere—and says this is his wedding day.—Anything wrong, Captain?" For Frank Ferrars had started up in excitement, and would have left the table.

"I beg your pardon," he said, sitting down again, "everyone's pardon; your story carried me away, Doctor. If that man's name is Lionel Carruthers, he is the man I have come here to seek. Heaven grant it may be so; he has been cruelly wronged and two lives spoiled by a hellish trick."

When Trooper Jackson was once more in his right mind, and opened his eyes again to the things of this world, he found himself in a pleasant room in a cool bungalow with a comely woman in nursing garb by his side, and the punkah swaying softly over his head, altogether a different place from the hospital of the cantonments. A gentleman was sitting there too—an officer certainly, not a hospital orderly—and he came forward at a look from the nurse.

"Better, Mr. Carruthers!" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply in a somewhat bewildered fashion. "I—I don't quite understand—" Then, after a pause, "I—I beg your pardon, sir, that is not my name."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, sir. I am trooper Jackson, 674. I fell ill then."

"Yes, we know all about that; I am glad to see you are better. You will be taken good care of here."

"You are very good, sir."

There was a bewildered look in his eyes, and the nurse came forward with a cup in her hand.

"No more now, sir, please," she said. "He will sleep again and then be better able to talk."

It was not till the next day that "Trooper Jackson" saw the gentleman again, and he had almost come to believe that the tall form in the white dress had been a dream.

"Is it safe to say all I want to him?" he asked the doctor when he went in, and that gentleman replied,—

"Yes, joy will not kill him."

So Frank Ferrars sat down by the bedside and addressed the patient once more as "Mr. Carruthers."

"No," he said feebly, shaking his head.

"Yes," Frank persisted. "I have come to tell you a story; will you listen to it?"

There was no answer, and he went on,—

"It is the story of a young fellow who went wrong over a woman, we all of us do it some time in our lives; but this one did a foolish if an honourable thing—he married her. He could not live with her, and they separated, and he, learning that she was dead, chose for himself a lovely girl, and married a second time, thinking to be happy at last. On his wedding day—ah, well, I will not speak of that," as the helpless form on the bed writhed in agony at the words, "except to say that it was all a lie, he was as free as air; the woman who had ruined him and blasted his life had a husband before she married him, a good true man who has come to her rescue now, and is sheltering and helping her to end her days in decent quiet and repentance. She has confessed all; she never was your wife. Edith knows and is waiting for you at home. I am her cousin, and I have come to find you and tell you the truth!"

"No more now," the doctor said, coming quickly forward, "he is fainting. Don't be frightened; you have not killed him."

Three months later a little group stood with dimmed eyes and bent heads in Sergeant Trench's quarters. His wife had lingered till now, and the end had come at last. Very little of the story that her husband had told the colonel was known in the depot. There was a rumour that the tall pale gentleman who was believed to be Miss Verchoyle's lover was mixed up in it somehow. He was said, by those in the know, to have been in some way lost, and found again by Captain Ferrars, and he bore a suspicious resemblance to the lancer who had come to go out with the drafts, but it was not for a long time that he was found to be the same man. It was

all conjecture as to what he was taken to the sergeant's quarters for when poor Mrs. Trench was dying.

Edith's hands were holding hers, and the eyes of the girl she had so bitterly wronged were looking pityingly into her face, while the unseen hand was lifting the curtain.

"Forgive!" she gasped, and she seemed to take them all in. "Forgive me!"

"Heaven knows we do, all of us," said the Colonel, in a husky voice, and Edith stooped and kissed the white face with her gentle lips, as Lionel touched the wasted hand; then they drew back. "We forgive her freely," Colonel Ferrars said. "But you have been most wronged, Trench. Yours has been a noble forgiveness."

"It has only been half-hearted sometimes, sir," was the reply, in a low tone, as the rest all turned away, and he took the dying woman in his arms.

Lionel Carruthers opened the door softly and went out. He had no part in that death-bed. The erring woman belonged all to the noble soul that had been true to her through evil report and good report.

The Colonel went to the window, and it was only Edith who heard the loving murmur, "Mary, my lass!" and saw the loving light that came into the dying eyes at the sound of the broken voice. Another minute and the veil was dropped again, and the career of poor Mary Trench was a thing of the past.

Silently they shook hands with the bereaved husband, and went their way, and Lionel Carruthers broke down and cried like a child when they talked of her and told him how she had made atonement for her evil ways in the life she had led at Canterbury.

Her story was never told there. Those she had helped and befriended should think of her as they had known her, and so carefully was her secret kept, that of those who wept around her grave, and they were many, not one guessed that she had ever been anything but the good angel they had loved and mourned.

All this is long ago now, but Mrs. Carruthers sometimes visits the old depot at Canterbury, where there is a new Commandant, but where she is still remembered by some of the old hands, who are delighted to see her and their old Colonel, and the pretty bright children that call her mother, and who are never tired of hearing the story of how papa was once a soldier for a very little while. Of the manner of his entering and leaving the service they are profoundly ignorant. Lionel does not care to tell them or any one how he enlisted in a fit of despair, and in the hope that some merciful chance would send him where he could get quickly killed, and forget that sorrow and disappointment are the lot of all men in this lower world.

## A TERRIBLE PROMISE.

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### CHAPTER XVII.

It was with very mingled feelings that Gertrude, Lady Chatterley, found herself on her way home, and literally in the train for Salton. Delight at seeing her child again, and being once more among friendly faces, was alloyed by the knowledge she must be ever on her guard lest her husband should discover that Mr. March was her brother Cecil, and the feeling that the whole tenor of her life would be changed now that her husband had thrown aside his careful habits and intended Chatterley Castle, instead of being remarkable for its meanness, to be celebrated throughout the county for its hospitality.

No more long quiet days alone with little Phillis. The old monotonous existence would be closed for ever; and what had the new to offer her?

Gertrude almost shuddered. She knew her husband's secret failing which she must strive to hide from all the world. Then, too, she had her relationship to Mr. March to conceal; it really

seemed to the poor anxious wife that henceforward she would always be acting a part, and yet through it all she was thankful for Cecil's return. It was something in her troubled mind, to feel he was near her. They might not meet often. For weeks together they might not have a chance of speaking to each other, but at least he was living in the same place within two miles of her, and in any danger would protect her.

Gertrude had selected the train for their journey. She was thankful the Earl did not insist upon travelling by the ten o'clock express. They were early at the terminus, and Lord Chatterley selected an empty compartment where they secured two corners opposite each other.

He was in a very silent mood. He supplied his wife with newspapers, but did not bestow any conversation upon her; only when the warning bell sounded he said in a tone of relief,—

"Thank goodness, we shall have the carriage to ourselves. This train doesn't stop before Peterborough."

He had spoken too soon. The door was flung open. Paul Verity assisted Beatrice Charles to enter, not recognizing her fellow-passengers until the train was moving out of the terminus; an example which Lady Chatterley followed, for, as they started, she said to her husband in a low tone,—

"That was Mr. Verity."

The Earl answered in the same key.

"Is that his sister? Surely our immaculate vicar wouldn't leave his wife to travel alone so soon after the wedding."

Beatrice Charles had settled herself by this time at the end of the carriage farthest from the Chatterleys. Gertrude thought the stranger one of the loveliest girls she had ever seen; and the Earl, who rarely bestowed much notice on feminine beauty, stared at his unknown companion with much interest. Beatrice felt dimly conscious of the scrutiny, and drew down her veil, when the Countess with ready tact, said, courteously,—

"I beg your pardon; but have I the pleasure of speaking to Mrs. Cartwright?"

"We know Verity," put in the Earl, speaking far more agreeably than was his wont, "though he was in such a monstrous hurry he did not recognise us, and as our Vicar married his sister, we thought—"

"Mrs. Cartwright has been at Chatterley more than a fortnight," answered Beatrice, "she and her husband saw me in Paris, and knowing I wished to come to England they offered me the post of organist when it was vacant."

The Earl laughed.

"My dear young lady, the Cartwrights were on their honeymoon, and naturally saw everything through rose-coloured spectacles. You'll be awfully disappointed. Chatterley is an obscure country village, and you'll be buried alive."

"It is not so bad as that," said Gertrude, kindly. "As we are going to travel more than two hundred miles together, don't you think we had better introduce ourselves? My husband is Lord Chatterley; and as we live most of the year at the Castle, we shall probably meet often."

Beatrice flushed. These, then, were Kenneth Ford's own cousins. Surely they would know of any enemy he possessed.

"My name is Charles," she said, simply, "my parents were English, but I have lived all my life in Paris. You cannot think how much I wished to come to England."

The Earl put down his newspaper to join in the conversation.

"I'm afraid Chatterley won't give you much idea of England; you will find it dreadfully dull after Paris. What part did you live in? Most English people seem to flock to Neuilly."

"Oh, Neuilly would have been far too grand for us," said Beatrice, frankly, "my grandmother was not at all well off; we lived near Montmartre. I was born there."

"Your grandmother will miss you very much," said the Countess, gently.

"She is dead, or I never should have left Paris, for she had lived there so long she was quite a

Frenchwoman. She could not understand my love for England and desire to come over."

"Well," observed the Earl, "I'm afraid you'll repent your bargain; but we'll do our best to make you feel at home at Chatterley. Gertrude, you ought to be in ecstasies, for if Miss Charles does not object to give private lessons, there will be a chance of Phil's learning French without leaving home."

It was not often he was so considerate. The Countess flashed a grateful glance at him.

"If you are going to give lessons," she said to Beatrice, "my little girl shall be your first pupil. She is nearly nine years old."

"And, according to her mother, the most wonderful child in the world," put in the Earl. "Here we are at Peterborough. Gertrude, as you have such an agreeable companion, you won't mind my leaving you, to smoke a cigar. I will come back at York and see that you have some lunch."

Left alone, the two women insensibly felt it easier to talk freely. Lady Chatterley always had a nervous, anxious feeling in her husband's presence, and Beatrice Charles had met so few gentlemen that any stranger of the sterner sex was rather alarming to her.

She looked at the Countess with just one touch of envy. Young, beautiful, rich, with an affectionate husband and little child, no wonder it seemed to the lonely little organist the peeress was to be envied. Little she guessed of the aching heart beneath those furs, nor that Gertrude's burden seemed at times well-nigh too heavy to be borne.

"I have not seen Mrs. Cartwright since she was a little child. Her family lived in my father's parish. It seems so strange that I should be going to meet her again as a bride. Do you know her well, Miss Charles?"

"I have only seen her twice. I think what I noticed most about her was her expression—it seemed almost radiant with happiness."

"And you have been staying with her mother?"

"Only for two nights. Mrs. Verity most kindly asked me to break my journey at her house."

"Did she take you to see any of the sights of London?"

"She was confined to the house with a cold, and—I do not think I should have had any heart for sight-seeing, it was only three months ago that I lost my kind old grandmother."

She said nothing of that other loss. She never mentioned the twin sister who had been her second self.

She knew that this sweet-faced Countess was the person who had first discovered Nora's death, and that she and her little girl had attended the nameless stranger's funeral. How Beatrice longed to pour out her terrible secret, but prudence kept her silent.

Mr. Wedgwood's parting caution was still ringing in her ears. "Above all, trust no one."

"Have you no other relations?" asked Gertrude, much interested.

"No; my parents died young, and I never had any uncles or aunts. Mrs. Cartwright feared I might be lonely at Chatterley; but I told her even in Paris I was alone in the world."

The Earl appeared at York, and escorted the two ladies into the refreshment-room; he seemed to have taken Beatrice quite under his care, and provided her with tea and sandwiches most thoughtfully.

Miss Charles decided he was very kind, but her heart did not go out to him as it had done to his wife.

"Do you expect anyone to meet you?" he asked, when they had changed trains at Wilmington, and were nearing Salton; "because, if not, I daresay we could drop you at the Vicarage on our way home—couldn't we, my lady?"

"With pleasure," answered Gertrude; "but I fancy Mrs. Cartwright is sure to send."

"She promised to," said Beatrice; "but it is very kind of you to offer. I am not going to the Vicarage, but to a little cottage close by."

"Elm Cottage," observed the Earl, "so called because there is not the ghost of an elm tree near it. Well, here we are at Salton. I hope you may be happy in your new home, Miss Charles. Lady

Chatterley will come and see you in a few days."

Mr. Cartwright was waiting for his organist. It surprised Beatrice to see how cold and formal was the Earl's greeting to the Vicar, she felt quite enough at home with the latter to say so. Jim laughed.

"My dear Miss Charles, according to local gossip, the Earl is like that to everyone, I have not yet found a single person in the parish who professes a regard for him, though rich and poor alike idolize his wife."

"I liked her best," confessed Beatrice, "but he was very kind to me, I travelled all the way with them, and he behaved just as though I was under their care, like a *preux chevalier*. He said if you did not send for me they would drive me home."

The Vicar opened his eyes.

"I must congratulate you, Miss Charles; Lord Chatterley must have been maligning to me. I confess the impression I had of him was that like the unjust judge of the Bible, he feared not God, neither regarded man, but I am glad I am mistaken. Of course you are coming to the Vicarage; my wife says that you must sleep there to-night, and move into your own abode by day-light."

Monica's greeting was very kind; she took the young stranger upstairs herself, and told her dinner was quite ready, but Miss Charles must not think of dressing; there was only one visitor, and he had dropped in unexpectedly, so would be in morning dress.

Monica herself wore a soft, grey surah silk, with lace at the neck and wrists; she looked the picture of a happy bride; but she had not the rare beauty of the girl she led into the drawing-room, almost as affectionately as though she had been her sister.

"Mr. Ford, let me introduce Miss Charles to you; you have one thing in common—a love of music."

Kenneth put out his hand; he noticed the girl trembled from head to foot as she put her little fingers into his, but he ascribed it to nervousness; he little guessed the awful associations his name had for her.

"I want to tell you something, Kenneth," said the Vicar when dessert was on the table, and the parlourmaid had retired. "Miss Charles has made a conquest of your cousins; she travelled with them from King's Cross, and the Earl offered to drive her home if we forget to send for her."

Kenneth's eye twitched.

"Are you a magician, Miss Charles? my cousin usually detests strangers, and shuns all intercourse with them."

"He was very kind to me, and Lady Chatterley offered me her little girl as a pupil."

"What, Phillis! She is a dear little soul," said Kenneth, heartily, "and about as unlike one's idea of an heiress as she can be."

"Is she like her father or her mother?"

"Neither particularly; but she favours her father's family. Lady Phillis is a Thorne to her finger tips."

There was music after dinner. Beatrice's performance was very different to Miss Hoskins'.

Kenneth went home thinking the Cartwrights had done an exceedingly clever thing in securing Miss Charles as the Chatterley organist.

"Well," demanded Lady Edith, who was sitting up for her son, "what is Miss Charles like?"

"She is one of the loveliest girls I ever saw—a perfect lady, and with a wonderful voice."

"Ken," and Lady Edith looked perfectly radiant, "I am delighted!"

Ken looked at her rather comically.

"Please don't prepare a disappointment for yourself, mother mine. Miss Charles is charming, but I should never fall in love with her. I expect you will, though."

"Why should I like her if you don't?"

"I like her extremely. I only warn you I shan't do anything more. You will fall in love with her, mother dear, because, in a certain way, she reminds me of our Maggie."

"Ken!"

"Yes," he went on. "I wasn't much more

than a boy when Maggie died; but I can feel Miss Charles is like her. I don't know what it is—face or figure. I couldn't possibly describe it, but the resemblance is certainly there. By the way, mother, did Chatterley admire Maggie?"

Lady Edith opened her eyes.

"Chatterley never admired but one woman—his own wife. I know poor Gertrude is not happy; but she never need doubt one thing, she is the only one creature her husband ever cared for! What made you ask?"

"Miss Charles travelled from London with the Chatterleys and Reginald appears to have gone out of his way to be polite to her. It isn't like him, mother!"

"No, it isn't," admitted Lady Edith. "I shall go and call there to-morrow. I want to see if Gertrude thinks Phillis grown."

A day of driving rain prevented this. Then came a bitter wind, but on the third afternoon from the Earl's return Lady Edith arrived at the Castle.

The improvements were now completed. Money had been spent with a lavish hand, and the place looked beautiful; but the shadow was not lifted from its lady's brow. Lady Edith's heart sank as she kissed Gertrude.

"My dear child, you are looking quite ill. Haven't you got over your fatigues?"

"Oh, yes, I am not tired."

"Is there any fresh trouble?" She spoke nervously, almost as though she had caught the terror in Gertrude's face.

"I hope not. Reginald is not here, or I would ask him to come in and see you. He started for Paris yesterday."

"Paris!" exclaimed Lady Edith. "Why, you have only just come from there."

"It seems he left a pocket-book full of bank-notes at our hotel. He has gone back to try to recover it. Fortunately, he has the numbers of all the notes, so I do not think there can be much difficulty; but he was terribly upset about the matter."

"Idleness," remembering her nephew's frugal mind. "Gertrude, if you will dine with us to-night I can send a message to your brother. It seems a splendid chance to give you a meeting."

"How good of you, aunt Edith."

"I will leave the message myself. I am going past Copley, for I mean to call on the new organist. Kenneth says she is quite a lady."

"You could not take her for anything else. Reginald says she looks like a peeress."

Lady Edith opened her eyes.

"I thought Chatterley never noticed girls. I mean I fancied he disliked them."

"He does, in general; but he took a tremendous fancy to Miss Charles. He proposed of his own accord, that she should give Phillis French lessons, and told me I ought to have been beforehand with the vicar and engaged his *protégée* as my companion."

Perhaps Lady Edith was prejudiced; but her nephew's approval hardly seemed to her quite a recommendation to Miss Charles, and she was a little graver than was her wont when the deaf old woman who lived at the next house to Elm Cottage, and "did for" the organist, opened the door of Beatrice's little sitting room and announced her.

Beatrice was not expecting visitors. She had on a rough serge dress and a snowy linen collar and cuffs. She was unpacking her books and arranging them on the shelves against the wall.

The winter sunshine fell full on her sweet, sad face, and Lady Edith's disapproval melted into admiration.

"You must be very lonely here," she said, when the first greetings had been exchanged.

"You look much too young to live by yourself."

"I am twenty," said Beatrice, frankly, "and I have no one belonging to me in the world. I would much rather live alone than with strangers."

"Well, you must come and see me when you feel dull; and Mrs. Cartwright is quite a near neighbour. Besides the Castle and us two, I am afraid there is no one near enough for you to visit."

She had turned the conversation into the very channel Beatrice wished.



"I don't quite understand English places. I suppose Salton is quite distinct from Chatterley."

"No one lives at Salton above the village folks. There is one other house where you might have found friendly neighbours, Copsleigh Chase, but the Hursts are away, and the present tenant is a bachelor."

It was the first ray of light Beatrice had found since she came; she felt quite certain her sister's destroyer, the false Kenneth Ford, was a bachelor.

"Mr. March is here only for a few months," went on Lady Edith. "My son is much attached to him, but he goes very little into general society; he has travelled half over the world and known a great deal of trouble, so that some people might think him grave and stern, but we are very fond of him."

"Has he been here long?" asked Beatrice, feeling she must know, even if her visitor thought her too curious.

"He came in August or September. I forget which, I have a terrible memory, but I think it must have been September. He goes up to London every now and then on business; he is an immensely wealthy man, and so liberal, I often tell my son he is a blessing to the place."

Little did the kind-hearted woman guess that every word she uttered was confirming the young organist in a terrible mistake. The visitor gone, Beatrice clasped her hands together, and paced the little room with feverish steps, crying excitedly.

"On the track at last! Oh, Nora, my own darling! I have found your destroyer; very soon I shall be able to keep my promise to grandmother, and avenge you."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE first Sunday after Beatrice arrived at Elm Cottage, Chatterley church was unusually crowded. Miss Hoskins made a point of being there to hear her successor, and expressed her opinion to a croupy afterwards, "that for her part she saw nothing in Miss Charles's playing to make such a fuss about; but on the whole people were very much in favour of the new comer, and Mr. Oliver told his vicar he felt as though peace had come after a storm now that the organ and the choir were no longer trying to extinguish each other."

Lady Chatterley was at church, and carried off the new organist to lunch with her, and he was introduced to little Phillis, who delighted her mother by taking a great fancy to Miss Charles.

"I think the whole place turned out to listen to you," the Countess told Beatrice, kindly, "I never saw the church so full."

"Father wasn't there," said Phil, "nor Mr. March. Mother, did you know Mr. March has gone up to London?"

Gertrude certainly knew it, since Lady Edith's kind plan for giving her a glimpse of her brother had been frustrated by that very fact, but she only answered, gently,

"Phil, you shouldn't gossip."

"I don't," said Lady Phillis, with childish indignation. "Gossip is unkind talk, Aunt Edith said so, and I wouldn't be unkind to Mr. March for the world. He's very nice, though you and father won't know him."

"Phillis, you should not say that!"

"Well," said Phil, gravely, "I'm sorry for Mr. March, he always seems so much alone, and generally, mother, you-like people who aren't quite happy. I can't make out why you won't be friends with Mr. March."

"Run and tell Jordan Miss Charles will want the pony carriage to go to the afternoon service, Phil. You may drive down in it with her if you like."

Off ran Phil. Her mother turned with a word of apology to Beatrice.

"I am afraid you will think her terribly precocious. You see, she is an only child, and I have made her so much of a companion that she is almost too sharp-sighted."

"She is a dear little girl," said Beatrice, "it is

so nice of her to like people because they are in trouble."

She did not ask any questions about Mr. March. To her it seemed perfectly clear—the Earl and Countess "would not know" him because they feared there was some guilty secret in his past.

As though fate had decided to keep Beatrice in her delusion, the second post on Monday brought her a letter from Mr. Wedgwood. He had told her he should write if he had any news for her, and in his professional caution, had made her direct a couple of envelopes to herself while she was at his office.

The very sight of her own handwriting told Beatrice who was her correspondent, and set her heart beating wildly.

"Have seen that venerable man. Could not be mistaken. It was impossible to claim his acquaintance as he was seated in a train which apparently waited on a siding for mine to pass. I send you this news that you may guess which household near you is mourning the temporary absence of the patriarch. Should you receive an urgent telegram or letter exhorting you to leave Chatterley, pay no heed to it, but communicate at once with your friend."

"P. W."

Twice through Beatrice read this note. Of course the "old man" was Mr. March. Equally, of course, Mr. Wedgwood feared some new development of his evil schemes.

Beatrice burnt the letter, and tried hard to put it out of her head, but she could not forget it. She knew that Mrs. Cartwright had mentioned her name days before she arrived at Chatterley; perhaps she had added that Miss Charles was an orphan, who had spent all her life in Paris with an aged grandmother. The man who lured Nora to her death would have guessed the expected organist was her twin sister. That Mr. March had left Copsleigh without even seeing the new organist did not in the least exonerate him from suspicion.

That Monday was an idle day to Beatrice; but the next morning Lady Phillis appeared for her first lesson. The Countess had arranged to send her little girl to Elm Cottage twice a week for a couple of hours, and she offered five pounds a quarter in return for Beatrice's tuition in French and music. The pay seemed liberal to Miss Charles; but had it been far less she would not have refused Lady Phillis as a pupil. She had taken a great fancy to the little girl, and, besides, she wanted to learn as much as possible of Mr. March, and she had an idea his child-champion could tell her something.

Perhaps the mother had cautioned Phil, perhaps the little girl really had her mind full of other things, for she never once mentioned her friend. She proved a very diligent pupil, but it was not till the lessons were over, and she was ready dressed waiting for her nurse, that she spoke of the master of Copsleigh.

"Mr. March is going to bring me a new doll. Isn't it good of him, Miss Charles?"

"Very," agreed Beatrice, "but will your mamma let you take a present from anyone she doesn't know?"

Phil looked troubled.

"I—I think so," she said at last, "Cousin Kenneth is such a great friend of Mr. March, and mother thinks he knows best."

"You are very fond of Mr. Ford, aren't you?"

"Awfully!" replied Phil. "but I think I like Mr. March best. You see he has no one to love him, and there's Aunt Edith to take care of cousin Ken."

"Mr. March must have friends somewhere, Lady Phillis."

"He says he lost them all. He did something very wrong once, and no one has cared for him since. He's so nice!"

"I am sure you think so."

"You know," said little Phil, "he's like me—oh, I don't mean to look at; but Mr. March was awfully poor once, and he thought he should be happy if he was rich; and I used to think I should be quite quite happy if mother had some new clothes and plenty of money. Well Mr. March and I both got what we wanted, and we

agreed the other day we thought we liked the poor time best."

The nurse's arrival brought Phil's eloquence to a close. Beatrice had sat down in a half-bewildered way to decide whether Mr. Wedgwood's letter required an answer, when Mrs. Kemp, the widowed charwoman, came in with a telegram in her hand.

"There's two shillings to pay for postage, Miss—you see we're nearly five miles from the office—and I do hope, Miss, it's no bad news for you. The very sight of a telegram puts me all in a tremble."

Thanks to Mr. Wedgwood's warning, Beatrice felt prepared.

"I think it may be about some things I am expecting from my friends in Paris," and she produced a florin to pay the messenger, with which Mrs. Kemp departed.

Left alone, poor Beatrice felt her courage fail her; her fingers trembled so much that she could hardly tear open the envelope. The message was in French, and had no doubt sorely puzzled the authorities of the rural post-office to transcribe.

Translated, it ran thus:—

"Danger threatens you; if you would not share your sister's fate come back at once, my aunt has a home ready for you. When you are safe away from Chatterley we can manage what you have at heart. Don't delay; shall expect you by the night mail from London on Wednesday. Claude."

It had been handed in at an office very near the Rue St. Denis; the mention of "my aunt," the signature "Claude," both proved that the sender of the message was indeed the pretended Mr. Ford. He had indeed been busy inquiring into the history of the twins, and was up in every detail of their life. Without Mr. Wedgwood's letter Beatrice would have believed the telegram came from Claude, and have trusted it implicitly; even now she did not feel quite easy.

At last her resolution was taken, she enclosed the telegram to Mr. Wedgwood, and in a few lines begged for his opinion on it. Then she dressed herself in her walking things, and determined to take her letter to the post-office at Salton, as she did not care to expose the address to the mistress of the little village shop at Chatterley, where the one letter-box of the place stood.

It was a good way to Salton, but Beatrice was used to walking, and liked the exercise; only, unfortunately, she was so engrossed in anxious thought that she took the wrong turning, and instead of going towards Chatterley walked on in the opposite direction.

It was growing dark when she realized her mistake, and then, despite her brave spirit, she felt frightened. On one side of her lay the North-shire Moors, on the other two narrow roads, both apparently leading nowhere; no house was in sight, and it seemed to Beatrice she might walk miles without coming to a finger-post or meeting a human creature.

At last she heard the sound of wheels in the distance. Oh! might the vehicle only come past her, and have a driver who could help her. Beatrice waited in feverish anxiety, until she could distinguish a rather shabby pony-carriage, with but one occupant, a man.

"Oh, stop! please stop!" cried the poor girl, forgetting everything except her fear of waddling all night upon those lonely moors.

Then as the pony carriage was drawn up close to her, and she recognised the driver was a gentleman, she blushed crimson.

"I am afraid you have lost your way?" Cecil Monkton said, pleasantly. "I don't know this neighbourhood very well myself, but I will do my best to direct you. Were you going to Salton?"

"No, to Chatterley. I had been to the Salton post office, and I believe I took the wrong turning for I have been walking a long time, and I can't see any place I passed on the way from Chatterley."

"You are walking straight away from Chatterley. You are three miles the other side of Salton."

"Oh—and would you tell me the way to Chatterley, and how far it is."



BEATRICE WAITED IN FEVERISH ANXIETY, UNTIL THE RATHER SHABBY PONY-CARRIAGE CAME UP WITH HER!

"I fancy it is eight miles; but am going to drive through Chatterley village, and I can set you down anywhere."

"But it will be troubling you so."

"Not in the least. Please jump in. You look tired to death, and if you are a stranger it is no easy thing to find your way along these Northshire lanes after dark."

Another moment and they were driving rapidly towards Chatterley. Fairly tired out with her long walk, and troubled with her anxious thoughts, Beatrice made no attempt at conversation.

She leant back in the seat only conscious she was going home without effort of her own, and that she might give herself up to the luxury of rest and safety.

She had ample time to notice her companion, and wonder how it happened she had not remarked him in church.

She saw a man of whose age she could form no idea, such a contrast was the fire of his dark eyes to the slow, quiet manner which seemed natural to him. His hair was dark, but a few silver threads were clearly visible. The broad open brow, the strangely engaging smile, which came so rarely and yet was sweet as a woman's all inspired Beatrice with trust. The impression her friend in need gave her was that he had just recovered from a long illness.

"I think you must be Mr. Cartwright's new organist," Cecil Monkton said at last, after the silence had lasted some time. "Do you think you shall like Chatterley, Miss Charles?"

"I like it very much. The people seem so kind, and Elm Cottage is a dear little place."

"Mrs. Cartwright took a good deal of pleasure in fitting it up for you."

"Do you live near?" asked Beatrice. "I do not think I saw you in church."

"I was away last Sunday. I'm afraid I can't be said to live anywhere; but I am staying for a time at Copsleigh. Is anything the matter, Miss Charles?" he asked, quickly, as the girl's face

turned ashen white, and her breath came in struggling gasps.

"Nothing," said Beatrice, faintly. "I am very foolish; but I was so tired."

"Of course you are tired," he rejoined, cheerfully. "You mustn't go wandering about like this till you have learnt all the geography of Chatterley."

One awful doubt was at the girl's heart: Was this the man she sought?

His being here was certainly an argument against it, since the telegram had been sent from Paris that very day; but, then, he might have had a confederate.

What told most against her suspicions with Beatrice was his face.

His dark eyes met hers so frankly, his smile was so true and kind, she felt he could not have lured Nora to her death. And yet it was hard to give up her theory. This morning she had seemed so sure of success, and now—

The man who had seen so much of life's seamy side and known such bitter trouble himself, felt certain that fatigue alone had not caused her sudden pallor; but he asked no more questions. He only tried to put her at her ease by talking cheerfully on ordinary subjects.

"You and I ought to be friends, Miss Charles," he said, simply, "since we have both spent so many years away from England. Until last August I had not seen my native land since I was a boy."

"Is Northshire your native county, Mr. March?"

"Oh, no; I never was here till this year. I met Mr. Hurst in London and found he was anxious to let his house, so I agreed to take it. I came down the first of September."

"Then you have only been here three months?"

"Not much longer; but it seems almost like three years. I am told Chatterley never had so many excitements in a short space as it has had since my arrival. First came a murder; then the Earl's illness; the arrival of a new vicar; and the grand alterations at the Castle."

Beatrice made up her mind he was not the man; but she put one searching question,—

"Did you see her, Mr. March?"

"Who?"

"The poor girl who was murdered."

"Yes. I am almost the only person in the place with a camera and a knowledge of photography. The police asked me to take a likeness of her. It was a painful task; but I did not like to refuse. I thought some day inquiries might be made which only a photograph could answer."

Beatrice forgot all caution.

Not only her doubts of Mr. March vanished but also cautious Peter Wedgwood's warning, "Trust no one."

She turned to her companion with a choking sob.

"God bless you."

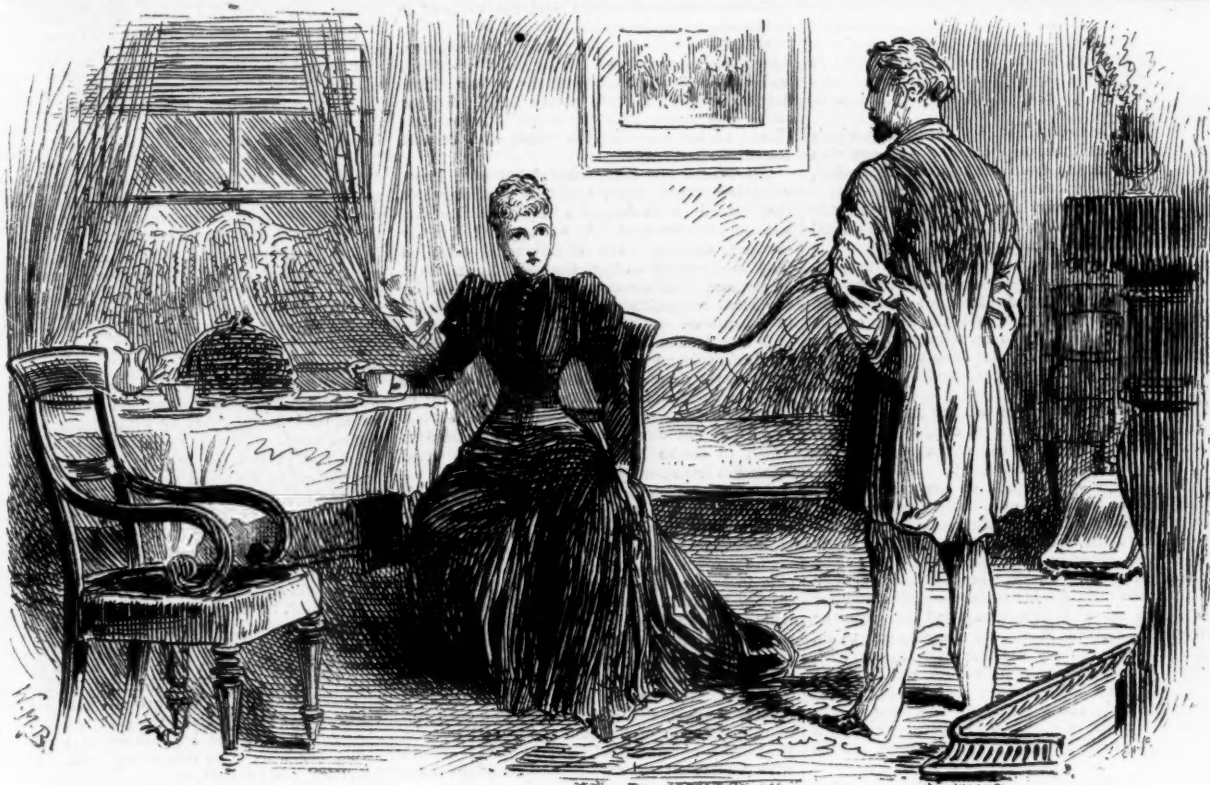
For one minute he was silent. Then he put one hand on her arm and said,—

"I think I understand. It was not indifference which made her relations leave her in a nameless grave. You are her sister, and you have come here to solve the mystery of her fate."

(To be continued.)

HAIRPINS are made by automatic and very complicated machines. The coiled wire is put upon drums, and becomes straightened as it feeds itself to the machine. It passes along until it reaches two cutters, which point the end at the same time that they cut it to the length required. This piece of wire then slips along an iron plate until it reaches a slot, through which it is pressed into regular shape. The hairpins are then put into a pan and japanned, after which they are heated in an oven with a temperature of from three hundred to four hundred degrees. £100,000 worth of hairpins are annually exported from England, France, and Germany.





"WHEN DOES YOUR HUSBAND INTEND TO RETURN FROM PARIS?" SIR BASIL QUERIED, ABRUPTLY.

## A BRAVE HEART.

### CHAPTER III.

JUSTINA sat for a long time in one attitude after her husband had driven rapidly away. She had planted her two elbows on the table, and had bowed her head upon her hands. She did not often allow herself so long a spell of idleness, but to-night the effort to rouse herself from her thoughts, and start once again at her work was not so easy to accomplish as usual.

The unexpected meeting with Basil Fothergill had thrown her, as it were, off the straight, hard lines of her laborious daily life. He had broken a kind of spell in her thoughts, he had revived old memories, old sweetenings, old sadnesses. He had emphasized the present weary unhappiness by bringing so clearly before her the remembrances of those old dead days, when life had had few shadows for little Justina North, despite the fact that poverty and she had already become acquainted.

Her childhood had been a simple and yet a far from conventional one. Her mother she never remembered. As long as she could recollect at all she had been alone always with her father, who had been to her something dearer than a parent—a loving friend, a sweet companion, a protector, and a playmate, even though the silver threads had been sown thickly enough in Richard North's hair before the baby girl, only blossom of his late-made love marriage, was sent into the world to fill, if possible, the terrible void made by her mother's death, and to become in time the very joy, the sunshine, the soul of the man's life.

It was for Justina's sake that Mr. North determined, as the years rolled by, that he must set to work and devise some means by which money might be added to his scanty clergyman's stipend.

Capital had he none except the capital that lodged in his clever brains; but these, in conjunction with his superb classical education and

his years of deep thought and reading, proved all he could need.

Basil Fothergill had been one of Mr. North's earliest pupils, and he had quickly become endeared to his tutor's heart, not on account of his brilliant talents, however, for truth to tell Basil was not by any means inclined to be a genius or anything above the most ordinary boy mental calibre, but because of his sterling nature, his frank, honest, chivalrous mind, his humanity to all creatures that surrounded him; and last, but not least, in Richard North's eyes, his extreme love and admiration for the dainty, flower-like child, who flitted about the old Rectory like a sunbeam caught and fashioned into a fairy's form.

The rest of the boys were kind also to Justina, but they, none of them, had Basil's touch or sympathy with the child, and, in fact, to most of them Justina assumed that contemptible and humiliating position which from time immemorial little girls have nearly always occupied in the estimation of little boys—or rather, perhaps one should say, little men.

It made no difference to Justina what the boys thought of her. She was absolutely happy. She was Queen of the Household. She had Basil as her big, faithful companion to play with her, or amuse her, or protect her, as the case might be, and she also had her studies which—with maybe an inherited taste from her father—she learned quickly to enjoy and love.

It was just before Basil left his tutor's house that Rupert Seaton made his appearance among Mr. North's boys. The son of a brother clergyman whose yearly income no greater than that which Justina's father possessed, had to find support and education of a large growing family, the boy was given a place among the other pupils' through a feeling of sincerest affection and truest pity.

Not one penny piece was paid to Richard North for the tuition and shelter that he gave young Rupert Seaton, but he asked for no better thanks than the sense of pleasure it gave him to

come thus nobly to the assistance of a brother-clergyman whom he knew and respected most exceedingly.

Looking back into the garden of her girlhood as she sat with her head bowed on her two hands, Justina realized, almost with a pang, how, from the very first, Rupert Seaton had shown himself to be the narrow, ungenerous, ungrateful and unworthy nature that she knew him now so surely to be.

Instead of giving even the faintest semblance of gratitude to his benefactor or seeming to comprehend for a single instant the full extent and depth of the goodness being bestowed on him, Rupert comported himself as one who, on his side, conferred an honour upon the genial, kind-hearted tutor by becoming an occupant and pupil in his establishment.

Justina remembered, too, how, in some unaccountable yet certain way, little quarrels and dissensions and disagreeables began to make themselves felt after Rupert Seaton had arrived on the scene. It was clear to her now that he must have been absolutely unpopular with the rest of the boys. Sir Basil's manner had been so full of significance when she had mentioned her husband's name to him, and Justina knew only too surely, and with a weary heartache that, however, great and universal Rupert's unpopularity might have been, it was only too justly founded, too well deserved. Even to-night, when facts and thoughts and remembrances of the past stood out so clearly before her, Justina could not have explained satisfactorily to herself or to others how she had come to do so rash a thing as to become Rupert Seaton's wife.

The days that had preceded her father's death—the actual death itself—and the weeks that had followed it were all merged into one great grey shadow of pain, misery, hopeless yearning, hopeless regret. Her short sojourn at her uncle's house had awakened her sharply from her deep soul anguish. The sting of perpetual-reminded charity, the cruel words thrust at her dead father's memory, the hard comments on his life

of patient toil, of honourable industry, of mistaken faith, which last, sorrowfully for himself and his loved child, laid him in a pauper's grave.

The insupportable misery of dependence upon the sullen generosity of those who did not like her worked the poor girl into a ripe condition to perform any rash act.

It was a cruel touch of fate that Justina's rashness should have taken the form of one who carried her merely from one trouble to another, and a far greater one.

There is no doubt that in the first instance Rupert Seaton had fallen in love (or what passed for love with him) with Justina.

The girl was extremely pretty—she was, indeed, more than pretty—she possessed a rare sort of loveliness which made itself manifest to all, and which, perhaps, was not the least of the reasons that made her so unwelcome a member of her aunt's household, the same said aunt possessing three daughters of plainest and most unattractive appearance.

Added to her beauty were her talents. Her father had educated her most carefully, and in a way such as few girls are educated even in this age of advanced culture for women.

Rupert knew the girl's cleverness. He had had definite testimony of it in the latter days of his stay beneath her father's roof, for had it not been for Justina's help he would never have made so brave a show in his examination papers as he managed to do. For her beauty first, for her talents secondly, for her social connections on her mother's side, although Justina had (except in the case of her Aunt Margaret) almost next to no acquaintance, to say nothing of intimacy, with these grand relations, and, because, by the sale of her father's cherished library at his (Rupert's) instigation, by the way, the girl became the possessor of about a couple of hundred pounds in ready money—he determined to make her his wife.

Work of any sort or description had no charms whatsoever for Mr. Seaton. His father had long since been gathered to his rest, and Rupert's proper duty would have been to have buckled to and done all in his power to help his mother and the rest of his family had he had a spark of affection or manhood in him; but Rupert was born a soulless being, for though his outward individuality was more than prepossessing, his mind and brain and heart were mere empty shells significant of no meaning save of intense selfishness, and of all the evils that follow on that base feeling. When his mother and his young brothers and sisters were shipped off to mother and a distant land by a combination of relatives, Rupert heaved a sigh of relief.

It would have been annoying to live perpetually with the possibility of some claim being made upon him, upon his brains and hands as a man if not upon his purse; and, therefore, it was with great relief that he watched the departure of his poor sorrow-laden mother, who would have willingly lived in a mud hut all her life if she could by so doing have been near to and able to gaze upon the fair face of her eldest born.

Rupert was, at the time that he proposed marriage to Justina, supposed to be earning a small salary as secretary to some city company, and it was armed with this credential of his prosperity that he induced the unhappy girl to leave her uncle's house and make her home with him. Not that Justina had a grain of mercenary fear or aversion in her constitution, only Rupert knew right well that, unless he had some definite position to offer her, he should never succeed in making her consent to his wishes.

It was a strong characteristic of the man that he always determined to get what he desired, if it were humanly possible, and he very much desired for a brief while to win Justina as his wife.

She was beautiful, she was proud, and she possessed talents which would always be sure of bringing in value of some sort. With the money fetched by the sale of her father's books they could live very comfortably for a few months at least; after that—well, Rupert had the firmest belief in chance and in his own good fortune—something would turn up. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" had always been a

favourite maxim with him, and the value of it increased as the days of his life went by.

Misled absolutely by the young man's manner, blinded by her grief and misery to the wisdom and caution which were strongly a part of her nature, grateful to find, as she imagined, poor child, one loving, faithful heart, Justina consented to leave her uncle's house and become Rupert Seaton's wife.

She did not love him, she did not even know what love could mean, save that yearning love that turned in its despair to her father's grave, but she was so grateful, so touched by the seeming devotion, the disinterested affection that was offered to her, that she turned to it gladly, and with her own hand set the seal on the most miserable mistake any girl could hope to accomplish.

A month was long enough in which to open Justina's eyes to the truth. The meanness, the poverty, the despicable selfishness of the man she had married, was revealed to her most surely in some form or other day after day, until at last she could not cling to one single illusion with which to clothe his soul and hide its vivid blemishes from her eyes.

As we have said, Justina had not loved this man, but the pain, the grief, the regret that overwhelmed her when she knew him for what he really was, was scarcely less strong for that.

She was, above all things, so proud, so honourable in her pride, so incapable of a mean or unworthy thought, that Rupert's natural evilness was something appalling to her. She could not combat with it; she learned almost immediately the futility of arguing or urging good maxims, or of impressing her own pure influence upon him.

In sheer material need and in the bitterest of mental despair, the girl turned from contemplating the ruin of her young life, and took up the burden of earning a livelihood for them both with a zest and an eagerness that might have been said to constitute the only pleasure she knew.

Rupert Seaton had been wise in his generation. His young wife possessed the brains and the faculty for earning good steady money, his wants were amply supplied to cover his detestable idleness and selfishness. He began to assume a sort of invalidism which deceived and appealed to Justina not a little at first because his fair, handsome presence was suggestive most certainly of inherent delicacy of constitution and feebleness of physical force.

She learnt, however, by degrees how much truth there was in Rupert's ill-health, and how much more faithfully this delicacy might be expressed in other and harsher terms.

Of late a subtle and not easily to be defined difference had made itself manifest to Justina in her husband's bearing. There had come a change upon him, a sort of restlessness and excitement not in keeping with his usual languid, luxurious idleness. She attributed at a little to the fact that about six months before Rupert had made the acquaintance of some young men who belonged, the girl feared, to a rakety, foolish, extravagant set, and who were as wanting in honour and chivalry and any of the higher and better qualities of the mind as Rupert could desire.

Since the introduction of this George Aynsworth and one or two others Rupert had given Justina many hours of deep, anxious, distressed thought. She was perfectly willing to work her hardest to sustain them both in a simple, straightforward fashion. The life she was able to provide was not by any means a luxurious one, but it was not devoid of comfort or of a certain humble prettiness, but it took all her time and strength and courage to keep this life going.

To find money for Rupert to fling away on folly or extravagance in any shape or form was quite beyond Justina's means; and yet of late her husband had made serious inroads on her limited purse, and had shown a desire to surround himself and dress himself in a manner that filled the girl's heart with alarm and with contempt.

The connection with this Aynsworth and his companions boded no good to them; that was soon

evident to Justina, and indeed the girl had begun to ponder and trouble what her best plan would be to sever her husband from these companions, and to save herself from further anxiety, to say nothing of pain to her pride and her sense of honour. She had long ago relinquished all hope of seeing Rupert turn to work. Her first bitter lesson in this knowledge had been taught early.

Soon after their marriage he lost the small appointment he had held, and Justina, in her sorrow, had made personal application to see if it would not be possible to regain this post, which, though small, had been a certainty.

The reception she met with, though courteous enough as far as she was concerned, sent her away crushed, humbled, suffering. It hurt her to have to realise that the man she had married should be one and the same with the man whose character and conduct had just been denounced in such plain severe terms.

She never told Rupert what she had done. He would have merely shrugged his shoulders and called his late employers by some strong and ill-chosen word. She only knelt down when she was alone and prayed for help and courage to bear her burden as well and as bravely as she could.

And so the time had gone on, the days had grown into weeks, and the weeks into months, and now it was a long two years since she had left her uncle's home, and plunged herself with all her beautiful youth into an abyss of mental trouble and perpetual labour.

Somehow, however, it was not until this night, as she sat with her head bowed on her hands, and tears of flaming blinded her eyes as the old sweet memories of the past crowded so thickly upon her, that the full bitterness of her life seemed to be revealed to Justina—that the contrast with the present and the past was made so clear to her, that the hopelessness of her future struck her with such despairing force. Weary, heartsick, and desolate, Justina, as she roused herself at last to attend to the claims of her inexorable duty, was tempted out of the depth of her sorrow to wish almost that the pleasure of meeting again with Basil Fothergill might have been denied her altogether.

The pleasure had so quickly turned to pain, and Justina was already overburdened with that ache of the heart which is none the less sure because it is unseen and unshared.

#### CHAPTER IV.

To Justina's surprise and alarm when she awoke the next morning, after a short rest of about three hours, in which neither good nor peaceful sleep had come to her, she found her husband had not returned home. This was an unusual occurrence, though there had been many times when Mr. Seaton had not arrived at his proper destination till a very late, or perhaps it would be better to say a very early hour, he had hitherto never failed to make his appearance in the little home sustained and made so bright and comfortable by his wife's unaided exertions.

Rupert was a keen appreciator of his own comforts, and Justina's efforts on this score were decidedly agreeable to him. Consequently he never failed to make every use of them.

This last development made Justina uneasy and hurt her extremely. Not that his absence caused her regret from those feelings which reign, as a rule, in a wife's heart, but because she feared every new move on Rupert's part must be productive of fresh anxiety and pain to her. She swallowed a hasty breakfast and went back to her work with a tired head and a heavy heart.

She had no clue to Rupert's possible whereabouts. These men with whom he now associated never came in contact with her. She had only seen George Aynsworth once, and she had conceived an extreme repugnance to the man; he was to her vulgar and something worse. The term adventurer seemed stamped all over him. She shrank from him and his bold admiring eyes as she would have shrunk away from any repugnant sight. Rupert had sneered at her for her coiffures.

"You are so mighty grand, Justina!" he had



said, when she had expressed her desire quietly, but emphatically, that Mr. Aynsworth might never be brought into her presence again.

"You give yourself the airs and graces of a queen, Heaven knows why; I don't. I confess I don't see what you have got to be so proud about. Your father was only a schoolmaster, and it is very evident from the way in which your mother's people keep away from you that they considered him to be no better than he ought to have been."

Rupert had paused here, expecting, perhaps, some retort from the quiet form that stood apart from him with averted face; then, seeing she would make no reply to his rude cruel words, he went on peevishly: "Well, it does not matter to me what you think; Aynsworth is good enough for me, and I mean to stick to him!" an assertion he carried into steady practice from that day forward.

Justina had never questioned or endeavoured to find out in the smallest way what form of amusement her husband found so enjoyable in the company of his new friends.

Had she been of a more suspicious nature or less harassed and engrossed in her work, it is certain that one question must have forced itself upon the girl's mind, and that question one dictated by the plainest of common sense—the query, indeed, as to how and where Rupert had obtained the smart new clothes and many other little appurtenances which now surrounded him, and carried an air of either money spent or credit given.

Justina, it is true, did observe that her husband appeared to be more particular than formerly in his dress, and his constant demand for small sums of money made her heave a sigh over his thoughtless extravagance in this respect; but after all, the girl knew absolutely nothing about the cost of those sort of things which seemed so dear to her husband's heart. She had never been brought in contact with smart tradesmen, or known what it was to wear splendid gowns, and so much that would have excited instantaneous suspicion in the mind of another escaped her notice altogether.

She settled down to her work on this particular morning with a sense of uneasiness which was not lightly shaken off, and was most detrimental to her labour.

But work had to be done, and habit so quickly grows into the likeness of nature, that Justina found her pen and her thoughts flying on apace almost before she was well aware of it.

Eleven o'clock came, and no sign of Rupert. She rose and moved about the room uncertainly. She could not help feeling alarmed, although a sort of bitter conviction within her told her surely that no harm had befallen her husband, and that selfishness alone in some shape or form had kept him from returning home.

While she was walking to and fro, troubled and very sad, a telegraph boy made his appearance at the narrow gate, and in another moment the message he carried was in Justina's hands.

It was from Rupert, and was a curt command with no kind of explanation whatever.

"Pack portmanteau with my things, and send to cloak-room Charing-cross by three sharp."

It was signed "R.S.," and had been sent from a post-office in the Strand.

Justina's pale, lovely face flushed hotly for an instant.

She dismissed the curious good-natured maid with the words, "No answer, thank you," and then sat down by the table and read the telegram a second and a third time.

"What did it mean? Where was Rupert? What did he intend to do? Was he going for some pleasure trip for a few days, or was his absence to be longer? Who were his companions? Where was his destination?"

The girl's proud, sensitive heart was stung to the quick by this treatment. Her own nature was so warm, so generous, so full of gratitude, so full of honour, it was almost impossible to her to have to realize that anyone, and more especially one who owed so much to her hands, could act in so strange, so rude, and so inconsiderate a manner.

There was, as has been said, no love in her

heart for this man; but she had accepted him as her husband, she had grown to regard him as something that belonged to her, something for which she must work—a creature who depended upon her for the bread he ate and the shoes he wore upon his feet, and to have him go from her like this with no excuse no explanation, no consideration in any shape or form, was most hurtful to her feelings, and to her sense of what was due to her as a woman and her position as his wife.

She rose wearily enough after a little while and went to fulfil his command. Although she had no desire to do so, for she shrank from the possibility of his imagining that she wished to inquire further into his movements, she dressed herself when the packing was completed, and took the portmanteau on a cab down to the station. She might perhaps have asked the servant of her lodgings to fulfil this task for her, but to do so would be to lay herself open to have all sorts of comment and conjecture passed upon this strange proceeding of Rupert's; and Justina had a yearning in her pride to wrap up the truth of her loveless, miserable marriage as much as possible from the gaze of all eyes.

She was not long in reaching Charing-cross and depositing the luggage as directed; then she hurried back to her work and her home as quickly as the humble but not expeditious omnibus could take her. Her thoughts went to the night before as she did so, and even in the sadness of her thoughts in the dread and nervous fear that Rupert's strange act had suddenly aroused within her, she could not refrain from a faint smile as she recalled the pleasant and damp situation in which her old friend had made himself known to her.

As she alighted and made her way back to the lodgings, she remembered, with a pang of annoyance and regret, that Rupert had in all probability occasioned Sir Basil much inconvenience by his non-appearance at luncheon as invited.

Tired as she was, Justina dragged herself onwards to a post-office, where she despatched a telegram to Sir Basil, briefly apologising for her husband's absence, and stating he had been compelled to leave town unexpectedly. This done, Justina made her way back to her writing, and without attempting to eat much or indulge in a rest, she worked steadily on for another two hours.

She had come to a pause, and was sitting, pen in hand, gazing out of the window, when a ring at the bell roused her, and as she turned and rose from her chair, the door opened, and Basil Rothergill was announced in a tone of considerable awe by the servant-maid.

Justina clasped her hand warmly.

"This is really kind of you," she said, as he put down his hat and stick—"a proof of true friendship to journey out so far when you are in town for such a short time."

"I hope you will believe in the existence of my friendship without any sort of kind of proof," Sir Basil said, with a smile on his lips for an instant—a smile that did not linger, however, as he stood in front of the fireplace, very tall and distinguished-looking, and let his eyes go about him in a casual way, taking in all the details of her humble home, but noting chiefest of all the tired pallor of her lovely face. "Thanks, very much, for sending me a wire," he went on, abruptly; "but it was not necessary, as your husband called on me early this morning, and explained that he would be unable to lunch."

Justina's hand that was resting idly on the back of her chair grew suddenly cold and rigid with fear and dread, and pain of pride.

"Oh! I—I did not know Rupert intended seeing you," she said, and at the tone in her voice he looked at her keenly. She roused herself with an effort. "Please sit down, Sir Basil, and then I will give you some tea." She rang the bell and stirred the fire as she spoke, and she tried hard to smile and seem at her ease; but it was a terrible effort, and without understanding it entirely, he was yet aware of some emotion that was troubling her.

He had not the exact clue, though the experience he had had of Rupert Stenton a few hours ago had let him see more clearly and surely in Justina's sorrowful young life than she could have imagined it possible.

"I always make my own tea," she said, forcing her lips to smile and move lightly.

And all the while when the kettle was brought and the tea was made, and the pretty teacups set out on the snow-white, embroidered cloth, her heart was burning and aching with this last shame that she knew only too well her husband had put upon her.

She had no need of words to tell her that Rupert had carried out the threat he had uttered the night before, and that the money that was being used to convey him, wherever he might be going, had come out of Basil Rothergill's pocket, borrowed as a loan that was never meant to be repaid.

Sir Basil chatted away as briskly as he could, but he was conscious of a dull sort of hurt at his heart as he watched her thin delicate hands move gracefully about and read the unmistakable weariness and trouble on her face. He was the kind of man who could not endure to know that any woman should have to toil and struggle and fight the world, and he never realized how strongly this feeling was impressed in him till he sat there looking at Justina and noting the undeniable traces of labour and anxiety and sorrow written legibly on her beautiful young face and form.

He rose all at once and took the kettle from her hands.

"Let me do this; you look worn out; have you been working all day? Must you work like this, Justina? Is it so necessary?"

"I promised faithfully to send this manuscript down to-night," she answered, evading the full meaning of his words. And then she laughed, "How well you manage a kettle! Do you often make tea, Basil?"

"Very often," he assured her, gravely, "for Molly hates all that sort of thing."

He took up his cup and drank his tea quickly.

"When will you come and pay us a visit at Croome, Justina?"

She smiled.

"I must give you the children's answer, Basil—one of these fine days."

"I am not a child, and that does not satisfy me."

"I should like to spend a little while with you," the girl said, gently, "but I fear—" She paused. "I think I could not make you any definite promise, Basil; I am not quite a free person."

He put his cup down and stood in front of the fire.

"When does your husband intend to return from Paris?" he queried, abruptly.

Justina gave a start.

"Paris!" she repeated, involuntarily, and then she paused, while the hot colour stole into her cheeks.

Sir Basil watched her a moment in silence. He understood better than words could have told him that this was the first intimation she had had of her husband's whereabouts. He honoured her for her proud reserve but he had a deep penetration of that dull pain at his heart, and a great yearning came over him to put his strong arms about this girl and carry her off to his country home, to his sister's genial care, to keep and hold her there for all time.

His anger and dislike towards Stenton grew unbounded in this moment, and he had a pang at his heart when he recalled the memory of that dead father who had worshipped and guarded his child in those bygone years as a treasure too great for earthly appreciation.

If Richard North could have stood where he stood now and gazed as he gazed upon that slender, toil-worn, grief-laden and delicately lovely girl, the heart of the father must have broke beneath the anguish of realising his daughter's cruel fate.

Basil roused himself to talk as unconcernedly and as lightly as he could. Until she herself allowed him to mingle in with her trouble, he would not venture to intrude upon it, but he registered a vow that come what might he would range himself henceforth in the background of her life as her true, her faithful friend, her protector even, if need be.

He had no exact knowledge of the real truth

touching her marriage, but he could guess pretty nearly at that truth, and a single glance at Rupert Seaton's fair evil face that morning had been enough to assure him that the qualities and characteristics that had made the boy so detestable were but too surely pronounced in the man whose lot it was to call Justina wife.

"I feel we are indeed old old friends," the girl said when Sir Basil rose to go finally. "It seems almost as if we had never been parted, as if we were back again in the dear old Rectory garden, and by-and-bye we should go across the lawn and meet daddy coming to look for us."

He held her small hand for a long moment. There were tears in her eyes and in her voice. He pretended not to see them.

"May I come again before I go? I am not returning for another few days. Thank you, Justina dear. You are very kind to let me be so privileged. Good-bye for to-day then. Don't work so hard if you can help it. Your little hand must be quite tired out. Good-bye, dear." Sir Basil dropped her hand and was turning away when he looked back. "You have my address; send for me, Justina," he said, abruptly, "if you should find yourself in need of a friend."

The words were almost strange, but they came from him involuntarily, urged by a sudden presentiment that there was a moment close at hand when she would need his friendship and his protection.

Perhaps the same feeling had made its way into Justina's heart. Anyway, she showed no surprise at his words, and instead she had a touch of comfort in remembering them when he was gone. She little imagined, however, as she drew a chair up to the fire and sat staring wearily and with a sick heart into the glowing coals how speedily she would make tangible and definite test of this promised friendship.

(To be continued.)

## FICKLE FORTUNE.

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### CHAPTER X.—(continued.)

"THERE was a crash and a yell, and a roar of laughter from the bystanders; and no wonder, for I had crashed directly into a huge jar of jam which she held in her hand, and in less time than it takes to tell it I was completely besmeared with it from head to foot. For once in my life I got enough jam in my mouth, and as I scrambled to my feet I beheld a young lady standing before me screaming with laughter. At a glance I knew it could be none other than Miss Forsyth. What I said as I hastily stepped up to her is but a confused memory to me. I managed to articulate that I had been sent from The Firs with a carriage for her. The more I said the more she screamed with laughter, in which I could not help joining to have saved my life.

"What a ride through the town with a jammed-up man like that!" she ejaculated. "Why, that would be too sweet for anything—so sweet that all the bees in the clover fields we passed would come flying after us to enjoy the sport."

"The laugh that followed fairly made the rafters of the station ring; and at this juncture a friend in need came to my assistance—one of my old chums—and in a trice had stripped me of my coat and hat, and replaced them by a new overcoat and Derby hat which he had just purchased. And when the luckless jam was washed from my face Richard was himself again."

"Now you look something like a respectable human being," she declared, as I helped her into the carriage.

"And all during the drive home we had the greatest kind of a laugh over my ludicrous mishap. It was forming each other's acquaintances under difficulties, as she phrased it. I can truthfully say that I never was so much embarrassed before a young girl in all my life. But do you know, Mercy," he went on, "that that laughable incident which happened made us better acquainted with each other during that

half hour's ride home than if we had met under ordinary circumstances and known each other for long months!"

Mercy laughed heartily at the highly amusing scene which he pictured so graphically, and said to herself that now she could understand why Leonard and this strange young girl were laughing so gaily together as they came up the gravelled walk.

"You will be sure to like her," cried Leonard, enthusiastically. "I will go and fetch her to you now."

But just as he was about to put his intention into execution, they heard the voice of Mrs. Frost and her niece outside, and they entered an instant later.

"Mercy," said Mrs. Frost, "my niece, Vera, is here. Vera, this is Mercy. I am sure you two girls will love each other very dearly."

Mercy turned hastily toward the direction from whence the sound proceeded, holding out her little white hands nervously, a great hectic flush stealing up into her pale face.

"Welcome to the Firs, Miss Forsyth—Vera," she said, in her sweet, tremulous, girlish voice. "I—I would cross the room to where you are standing, if I could, but I cannot. I cannot look upon your face to welcome you, for—I am—blind!"

There was a *frou-frou* of skirts upon the velvet carpet, and the next moment Vera Forsyth's arms were about her.

"There could not be a sweeter welcome, Mercy—if I may call you so—and I am sure we shall get on famously together," murmured Miss Forsyth, and a pair of ripe red lips met Mercy's but the kiss was as light as the brush of a butterfly's wings against the petals of a rose, and there was no warmth in the clasp of the soft, ringed fingers.

Somehow, although the stranger's voice was sweet as the sound of a silver lute, and her manner caressing, Mercy did not feel quite at home with her.

"If I should judge by the tone of her voice and the words she utters, my fancy would lead me to believe that she was very beautiful," thought Mercy. "But then Madge said that she was plain, very plain of face, although Leonard has said that she was beautiful. No doubt he wanted to leave a good impression on my mind regarding her."

The evening that followed was a happy one for Mercy, because even without being coaxed, Leonard signified his intention of remaining in the house, instead of going out to the club, as was his custom.

It had always been a deep grievance of Mercy's that her musical accomplishments were so meagre.

She only knew a few accompaniments that she had picked up, while Miss Forsyth played divinely.

And her voice—ah! it sounded like the chiming of silver bells. And then, too, she knew so many beautiful songs, and they were all such tender love songs.

She was so glad that Leonard liked them, too, and her poor face would flush scarlet, and her white lids droop over her sightless eyes, as the sweet singer's voice rose and thrilled over some tender love words; for she felt sure that her Leonard was looking at her with all love's tender passion in his glorious dark eyes.

### CHAPTER XI.

It was quite late when the group that was gathered in the drawing-room dispersed that evening; but when the girls found themselves alone in their own room, which they were to share together, they sat down for a comfortable chat ere they retired.

"Do you think you will like the Firs?" asked Mercy.

"It seems pleasant enough," returned Vera, with a yawn; "but it's not the house so much, it's the people in the neighbourhood. Are there many young folks hereabouts?"

"Yes, plenty."

"Are they very jolly, or are they terribly dull?"

"Well, about as jolly as Mr. Trescott," laughed Mercy. "He's not so very jolly, and yet he is wonderfully good company."

"Yes, he is indeed," assented Miss Forsyth. "Is he rich?" she asked, point-blank, in the very next breath.

"No," returned Mercy, "but he may be well off some day, I hope."

"Handsome and poor! That's too bad—that's a poor combination!" sighed Miss Forsyth, her countenance falling. "But tell me about him, Mercy, and—how he ever happened to take a fancy to a quiet little mouse like yourself. I have heard that it was your guardian's wish, as he was dying, and that the idea was quite a surprise to him—to Mr. Trescott, I mean. Is that true?"

"Yes," assented Mercy, thoughtlessly enough. She would not have answered the question in that way could she have seen the eager anxiety on the face of the girl who asked it.

"Does he make love to you very much?" whispered Vera, laying her soft cheek close against the blind girl's. "Forgive the question, but, do you know, I have always had a longing to know just what engaged people said to each other and how they acted—whether they grew more affectionate, or, after the grand climax of an engagement had been entered into, if—somehow they did not act a little constrained toward each other."

Mercy laughed long and merrily at the quaint ideas of her new friend. But, then, no doubt all girls wished to know that. She had done so herself once.

"You do not answer me," murmured Miss Forsyth. "Now, please don't be unkind, Mercy, when I'm just dying to know."

"Well," said Mercy, waxing very confidential, after the fashion of girls. "I'll tell you my experience; but mind, I don't say that it is like every other girl's. Leonard has been just a trifle bashful ever since the afternoon that he asked me to—be his wife, and just a little constrained; but I always account for it in this way: that he does not want me to think him silly and spoony. He has grown, oh! ever so dignified. Why, he hardly ever says anything more about love—he thinks he has said all there is to say. And his carresses are the same way—just a little bit constrained, you know."

Vera Forsyth had learned all that she cared to know.

"Thank you, dear, ever so much, for gratifying my curiosity," she said, aloud; but in her own heart she said—

"I knew it—I knew it! Leonard Trescott does not love this girl with whom they have forced him into a betrothal. No wonder he looks sad and melancholy, with a prospect before him of marrying a blind wife! Ah, me! it is too dreadful a fate to even contemplate."

She looked complacently in the mirror at her own face. Well might Leonard have remarked that it was as beautiful as a poet's dream.

Nothing could have been more exquisitely lovely than the deep, velvety, violet eyes, almost purple in their glorious depths, and the bronze-gold hair, such as Titian loved to paint, that fell in heavy curls to her slender waist.

One would scarcely meet in a life-time a girl of such wondrous loveliness. Vera was only twenty, but already she had broken hearts by the score.

She had only to smile at a man with those ripe, red, perfect lips, and give him one glance from those mesmeric eyes, and he was straightway her slave. And she gloried in her power.

Thrice she had broken up betrothals, and three young girls were heart-broken in consequence, and had lifted up their anguished voices and cursed her for her fatal beauty. But Vera only laughed her mellow, wicked little laugh when she heard of it, and said—

"Poor little simpletons! Before they engaged themselves they ought to have been sure that they held their lovers' hearts completely. It were better for them to realise before than after marriage that the men they meant to stake their all upon could prove fickle at the first



opportunity when a pretty girl crossed their paths."

And who could say that there was not some little truth in this?

The two girls whose paths were to cross so bitterly slept peacefully side by side that night; but long after Vera's eyes had closed in slumber, Mercy lay awake with oh! such a heavy load on her heart.

She wished she was gay and bright, like Vera, and ah! what would she not have given only to see—only to see once again! And she turned her face to where she knew the moonlight lay in great yellow bars on the floor, and sobbed as she had never sobbed since she had become blind, and fell asleep with the tear-drops staining her pale face, a long, deep sigh trembling over her lips.

Both girls awoke early the next morning.

"When do you have breakfast?" asked Vera, with a yawn.

"At eight o'clock," said Mercy; "so we need not be in a hurry about getting up. It cannot be more than six now."

"Oh, dear! then I shall have to get up at once," cried Vera, "for it takes me fully that long to dress."

"Two hours!" cried Mercy, amazed, adding, "Why, just put on a wrapper. Nobody here ever thinks of making a toilet to appear at the breakfast-table. There is no one but Mrs. Frost, Leonard, you and I."

She could not catch Vera's unintelligible reply, but she noticed that the girl was not to be persuaded.

She commenced dressing at once.

Soon Mercy detected a strange odour of burning paper in the room.

"What is that!" she cried, in alarm. "Oh, Miss Forsyth, the house must be on fire!"

Vera laughed long and loud.

"You delightful innocent little goose!" she cried. "I am only curling my bangs with an iron heated over the gas, and I'm trying the tongs on paper to see that they are not too hot. I put my curls up in paper last night, but the horrid old things wouldn't curl because of the damp atmosphere, and—" She did not finish the sentence, for Mercy supplied it in her own mind—"her new friend was desirous of looking her best."

Leonard was pacing impatiently up and down the breakfast room when they entered.

"Good morning, Miss Forsyth; good morning, Mercy!" he exclaimed, eagerly; and Mercy's heart gave a quick start, noting that he called her name last.

And another thing struck her quite forcibly. To her great surprise, she noticed that Vera spoke in quite a different tone from what she did when they were alone together in their own room.

There her accents were drawling, but now they were so wonderfully sweet and musical that Mercy was struck with wonder. She never knew that a person could speak in two different tones of voice like this.

At the breakfast-table the conversation was bright and merry, though outside the rain had commenced to patter against the window-pane.

Mercy felt strangely diffident, for only a small portion of the conversation was directed now and then to her, and Leonard and Miss Forsyth kept up such a lively chatter that there was scarcely an opportunity to get in a word edgewise.

The conversation turned upon riding, and it brought a strange pang to Mercy's heart, for that had been the most pleasurable accomplishment she had learned during the first few weeks she had been at the Firs; and oh! she loved it so passionately.

In the very hour when they told her that she would for evermore be blind—stone blind—the cry that had sprung from her lips was, "And can I never again ride Bonnielle?" and she bowed her head in a storm of wild and tempestuous grief.

For many a day after, Leonard would not even have the name of Bonnielle mentioned in her hearing. And now how strange he should bring up the subject in her presence.

"I am so sorry it is raining, Miss Forsyth," he said, "for I had promised myself such a pleasure

for this morning. I had intended asking you to join me in a canter over the country. This is just the season of the year to enjoy the bracing air. We have a little horse in the stable that would delight you, if you are any judge of equine flesh. Its very name indicates what it is—Bonnielle. You ride, of course?" this interrogatively.

"Oh, yes!" declared Vera; "and I always thought it would be the height of my ambition if I could own a horse."

"That would be a very slight ambition to gratify," returned Leonard Trescott. "You may have—"

He was about to add, "Bonnielle," but at that instant his eyes fell upon Mercy. She was leaning forward, her sightless eyes turned in his direction, with a world of anguish in them that would have melted a heart of stone.

Mrs. Frost saw the storm approaching, and said, hastily,—

"I have always been thinking of buying a pony for my niece, and if she is a very good girl, she may get one for Christmas."

Leonard looked his thanks to Mrs. Frost for coming to his rescue so timely.

Mercy lingered after the others had left the breakfast-room, and called to Leonard to wait a minute, as she wished to speak with him.

He had a guilty conscience; he knew what was coming. She meant to ask him if he intended offering the horse to Miss Forsyth, and, of course, he made up his mind to deny it.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE long weeks that had passed since the never-to-be-forgotten steambot incident on Bank Holiday passed like a nightmare to poor Fred Worth.

Slowly but surely the knowledge had come to him that Mercy, his little sweetheart, had faded like a dream from his life; and as this became a settled fact in his mind, his whole nature seemed to change.

He grew reckless, morbid, and gay by turns, until his old mother grew terrified, fearing for his reason. His whole heart had been in his work before, and his one aim in life had been to make money.

He had saved quite a snug little sum, which he was very prudently placing in the bank.

Now, to his mother's horror his recklessness lost him his position, and he did not have enough ambition to try and secure another place, but commenced to draw his little hoard from the bank, and his money was disappearing like snow before a summer's sun.

He began coming in late at nights, as well, and the widow, who listened for his footsteps, cried out in anguish: "Would to Heaven that I had died ere I had lived to see this horrible change take place in my idolised son!"

His cousin Ellen keenly felt the change in him. It was she who comforted the poor old mother, and who pleaded with Fred to try and take up the duties of life again, and to forget faithless Mercy.

But he would only shake his head, and answer that he would never cease to love Mercy and search for her while life lasted. But troubles never seem to come singly. One day, as Fred was pacing restlessly up and down the street—the vantage-ground which he always sought at six o'clock each evening, to scan the faces of the working-girls as they passed, with the lingering hope in his heart that some day, sooner or later, his vigilance would be rewarded by seeing Mercy—a terrible accident happened which almost cost him his life.

Some scaffolding round a block of nine buildings, which had done service many a year, suddenly fell, and Fred was knocked senseless to the pavement.

Surely it was the workings of Providence that Agnes Burton came along just at that critical moment.

With a wild, bitter cry she sprang forward, flinging herself upon the prostrate body, shrieking

out as she saw his handsome, white face with the stains of blood upon it:

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy! It is Fred Fred Worth!"

Kindly hands raised him. No, he was not dead—only stunned, and terribly bruised.

A cab was hastily summoned, and, accompanied by Agnes, he was taken home.

The girl broke the sad news gently to Fred's mother and to Ellen. It was many and many a day before he left his couch; the accident had proved more dangerous than had been at first anticipated, for brain fever had set in.

Every day on her way home from the works Agnes would go several streets out of her way to see how Fred was getting along, and Ellen and his mother soon discovered that it was something more than mere friendship that actuated the girl's visits. Although against their expostulations, every shilling that she could scrape together, over and above the cost of the bare necessities of her living, she would expend for fruit to bring to Fred.

"I feel such a great pity for him," she would say; "for he has never, never been the same since Mercy disappeared so suddenly." And they would look at the girl with wistful eyes, realising that in her case, surely, pity was akin to love.

They guessed Agnes's secret long before she knew it herself, and they felt sorry for her; for they knew her hopes were useless—that Fred could never return the girl's love.

His mother and Ellen talked the matter over carefully, and concluded that it was best for the girl's peace of mind to break up this infatuation, if they could, at once.

At this epoch an event happened which turned the tide of affairs into a strange channel.

By the death of a relative Fred suddenly found himself possessed of a fortune.

He heard the startling news with a white, calm, unmoved face, while his mother and Ellen almost went wild with joy over it.

"It matters little to me now," he said. "Wealth has no charms for me." And they well knew why.

The intelligence came like a thunderbolt to Agnes Burton.

It was Mrs. Worth who told about it while the family were gathered about the tea-table.

The girl's face grew white as death, and she looked over at Fred with startled eyes.

Before she could ask the question that sprang to her lips, Mrs. Worth added,—

"Of course this will make a great change in Fred's prospects. He says that we shall soon leave here and go somewhere into the country—Ellen and I and himself—and that we will leave London far behind us, as there is no tie that binds him here now."

Agnes tried to speak, but the words refused to come to her icy lips. She made an effort to raise her eyes to Fred's face, with a careless smile; but it was a failure—a dire failure.

The table seemed to suddenly rise and dance before her.

She rose hastily, with a wild prayer that she might get quickly out of the room, for she felt her throat choking up with great sobs, and realised that in an instant more she would have burst into tears.

Poor Agnes Burton took one step forward, then fell unconscious at Fred's feet.

"Why, what in the world can be the matter with Agnes?" he cried, raising her in his strong arms. "Is she ill? Let us send for a doctor—quick!"

Stay!" said his mother, as he deposited Agnes on the sofa and turned quickly to put this last thought into execution. "Her trouble is one which no doctor can alleviate. It is an affair of the heart."

Fred looked at his mother in amazement.

"An affair of the heart!" he repeated. "Surely not, mother. Why, I have known Agnes ever since I can remember, and I never yet knew her to have a beau."

"Perhaps she has given her heart to someone who does not return her love—who may not even know of it," suggested Mrs. Worth, quietly.

"Impossible," declared Fred. "I have known her for years, I say, and if there was an affair of

the heart between Agnes and any of the young men at the works, I should have known something of it."

Mrs. Worth came nearer and laid her hand on her son's arm.

"Are you sure, Fred?" she asked, in a low voice.

He gave a great start.

"I know of one whom she loves, and who, she knows, never thinks of her. When his life hangs in jeopardy her secret was revealed to me."

"Surely you do not—you cannot mean, mother—that she—that I—"

"Yes, that is what I mean," returned Mrs. Worth, quietly. "Agnes Burton loves you, my boy; but do not be hard on the poor girl. Remember, love goes where it is sent. She never intended that you should know it. She did not breathe a word about it to anyone. It was by the merest chance that we made the discovery, and she does not dream that we know it."

Fred sunk down in the nearest chair, quite overcome with dismay.

His mother came and bent over him, smoothing the fair hair back from his damp brow with a trembling hand, but uttering no word.

At last he broke the deep silence,—

"What am I to say—what am I to do, mother, if—if your surmises be actually true?"

"They are not surmises, my boy," returned his mother; "they are truths."

"You know that I like Agnes," he went on, huskily; "but as for any other sentiment—why, it would be impossible. My life will always be tinged with the bitter sorrow of that other love-dream which was so cruelly shattered. I—I wish to Heaven you had not told me your suspicions about Agnes, mother."

"Her secret fell from my lips in an unguarded moment," she answered, slowly, "and I am sorry you know all. Yet it must be a source of comfort to you to know that, although Mercy Wood was false to you, there is one heart which beats only for you."

Fred started to his feet, a dull pallor creeping into his face as he drew back from his mother's touch.

"Mercy is not false to me!" he cried. "If an angel from Heaven should tell me so, I would not believe it. She is my betrothed bride. She wears my betrothal-ring upon her little hand. No matter where she is, she is true to me—true as Heaven's promise. Shame has caused her to hide herself from me, because she was so foolish as to go with another on an excursion on Bank Holiday. But I have forgiven all that long ago. Oh, Heaven! if I could but let her know it!"

Mrs. Worth shook her head.

"A young girl who can leave you for months without a word does not care for you, my boy," she answered, sadly. "Surely there is great truth in the words that 'Love is blind,' if you cannot be made to see this."

Still the noble lover shook his head. There was no power on earth strong enough to shake his faith in Mercy's love.

Mrs. Worth had said all that she could say for Agnes, and she bowed her head, and great tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. She felt great pity for Agnes. Why could not her son love her? She had heard the story of jilted lovers turning to some sympathising heart for solace, and in time learning to love their consoler, and she wondered if this might not mercifully happen to her darling, idolised boy.

She watched him as he paced excitedly up and down the room. Suddenly he turned to her, and during all the long after years of sorrow and pain she never forgot the expression of his face.

"Mother!" he cried, hoarsely, "if my Mercy ever proved false to me, I should be tempted to—to—kill her—and—then—kill—myself!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

THE *contraintes* which had been so cleverly avoided—of giving Bonnhelle to Miss Forsyth, and Mercy's keen resentment—should have proved a lesson to Leonard Horton and warned him not to play with edged tools.

He was a little careful of what he said to Vera for the next few days, when Mercy was present; but gradually this restraint began to wear off, and he grew to be almost reckless in the way he laughed and carried on with the girl, even though this *fiancée* was in the room. This attention was certainly not discouraged by Vera Forsyth.

He smiled to see her go in raptures over everything in and about the Firs, and she, with her glorious dark eyes, always smiled back at him. Their chats grew longer and more frequent; they were fast becoming excellent friends.

They had sent for Vera to become Mercy's companion, but it was whispered among the old servants of the household that she was proving herself to be more frequently the companion of Mr. Trescott, and they talked about it in alarm, wondering how it would all end. They felt indignant, too, that such a bold flirtation—for it had certainly come to that—should be carried on right in the face of poor, blind Mercy.

"Some one ought to give her a hint of what is going on," cried indignant little Madge, the maid. But there was no one who could find it in his or her heart to warn her of what was transpiring. The blow would be more than she could bear, for she loved Leonard Trescott better than life itself.

They wondered if little Mercy guessed that she led Vera to the table, while she, blind as she was, groped her way as best as she could to her own seat. They hated to see him lavish attentions on the beauty, and it drove them almost out of their self-possession, to see their eyes meet in that provoking mutual smile.

Mercy was beginning to feel Leonard's neglect, but no thought of the true cause of it ever dawned upon her.

Ah! could she have seen how they paced the grounds together arm-in-arm, and how near they sat together on the step of the front porch, and in what a lover-like manner he bent his dark head over her little, white hands, the sight would have killed Mercy.

"I wonder if they think we are fools!" whispered the servants, indignantly, one to the other; and their blood boiled with rage at this open love-making.

But even the attention of Leonard Trescott seemed to pall upon the beauty. The Firs was dull; she wanted more life, more gaiety.

"Why not give a grand ball," she suggested, "and invite the whole country-side?"

She longed for more hearts to conquer. Vera was one of those vain, shallow girls who must and will have a sentimental flirtation with some young man always on hand. She, like those of her mischievous class, really meant no harm while doing a great deal of wrong. Such a girl, from mere vanity and pastime, will try to outshine a companion and even win the heart of a betrothed lover from his sweetheart, caring little for the broken vows and the ruined lives strewn along her path.

Leonard seized eagerly upon the idea, because it would please Vera. Mrs. Frost knew no other than her beautiful, wilful niece's pleasure. No one consulted Mercy. She seemed to have been left entirely out of the calculation.

For the first time since Vera Forsyth had come to the Firs, Mercy regretted her presence there.

What would be the ball to her? Surely they ought to know that she could take no part in it, for she was blind.

When she found herself alone with Vera she spoke of this, but the girl turned it off with a little laugh.

"Even so," she declared. "The Firs ought not to be shut up and barricaded. You need to have a little life to keep your spirits up. You are justifying for some kind of liveliness. And poor Leonard! every one is feeling sorry for him. They say he is growing so dull."

"Do they say that?" cried Mercy, the colour deepening in her cheeks.

"Yes—and more," assented Vera. "And for that reason I would advise you to study appearance, so that every one may know he is happy—at least, let them think he is."

That words struck Mercy with a cold chill, as her companion had intended that they should.

"Then let the ball be given, by all means," she returned, with a little quiver in her voice.

And so the matter was arranged.

For the next week Vera and Leonard were busy with the invitations. They sat side by side comparing them as they made them out, and never once seemed to note Mercy's presence.

If any one on the list did not quite suit their fancy, they were quickly rejected; but Mercy noticed that he never once turned to her, his betrothed bride, and asked her opinion.

There was one young girl to whom Mercy had been quite attached, who lived very near the Firs, and who had run over to see her almost every day, up to the time Vera had come. Since then her visits had been less and less frequent; within the last fortnight they had ceased altogether.

Mercy was very anxious, of course, that this young girl should be invited; but Vera put in a demurrer at once.

"Of all the girls I ever met, I dislike her the most," declared Vera.

She was very careful not to tell the real reason why.

This same young girl had been the first to notice her flirtation with Leonard Trescott. They had had quite a stormy little scene over it, for the girl had attempted to rebuke Vera in her modest way, and she had retorted by flinging out that it was none of her business, anyway, saying that she would flirt with Leonard just as much as she pleased, and that it was a shame for such a handsome young fellow to marry a girl stone blind.

They had parted in anger. No wonder, we repeat, that Vera objected to invite Mercy's friend to the grand ball.

"Oh! of course we must invite her," said Mercy, when her friend's name was brought under discussion. "Mustn't we, Leonard?"

He turned away and walked moodily to the window without replying. If Vera did not like her, that settled the matter. He dared not put in one word in the girl's favour, though Mercy was clamouring for his opinion.

"You must settle the matter, Leonard," said Mercy.

"Let me suggest a better way," he replied, gallantly, as he took his seat at the table again. "You two girls arrange it between yourselves."

"But we don't think we will come to an agreement," pouted Vera. "You will have to choose for Mercy and me."

He gave her a startled, sweeping look, and she knew by that that he would not dare go against her for Mercy.

"I must decline," he said again, for she felt nervous with those sightless eyes turned eagerly in his direction.

"You must say 'Yes' or 'No,'" said Mercy, never dreaming that his answer would be in the negative, for on the week that she had first come to the Firs he had said, "I must introduce you at once to Maud Grant, who lives across the way. She is a lovely, quiet girl, and I know you will like her." And Mercy had liked gentle Maud Grant.

She thought of this now as the question of inviting her to the ball had come up, and never for a moment had she doubted the result of his decision.

"You must answer 'Yes' or 'No,'" pouted Vera, impatiently. "Come, we are wasting time."

Vera leaned over close to his chair—so near that the dark rings of her hair brushed his cheek, thrilling him to the soul.

"You must choose," she whispered; and he knew that it was a challenge as to which he should please—herself or Mercy.

Closer, closer still she leaned, until his very pulses grew mad with the nearness of her presence, and with childlike confidence her soft little hand crept into his, and nestled there securely.

There was no one to see, though Mercy—Heaven help her!—sat so near her.

The touch of that little hand was magical.

In the mad impulse of the moment he raised



it to his lips and kissed it, and Vera knew that she had won the battle even before he spoke.

"Must Grant have better not be invited to the ball," he said, huskily. "That is my decision."

Mercy sunk back in her chair as though a sudden blow had been struck her.

She never once dreamed that her betrothed lover would decide against her.

It fairly took her breath away, and a sudden new sensation shot through her heart that had never found lodgment there before.

She drew back and said no more, a deathly pallor overspreading her face.

She did not interfere again, and she suffered them to arrange the invitations after that to please themselves.

She rose quietly at length and made her way to the window, great tears rising to her sightless eyes. They did not even notice her absence, but chatted and laughed quite the same.

After they had finished Leonard proposed that they should take the invitations to the post. This Vera gaily assented to, and they left the room without once making any excuse to Mercy for leaving her there alone.

The fact was that they were not even aware that she had seated herself in the bay-window behind the heavy curtains.

For the first time Mercy wished that Vera had not come. She was already beginning to feel the weight of the iron-hand that was soon to crush her—jealousy.

She awaited their coming with the greatest impatience, but it was long hours ere they returned.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

LEONARD TRESCOTT did not intend being untrue to Mercy when he let himself drift into that platonic friendship with Vera, the beauty, which had developed into such a dangerous flirtation.

Gradually the girl's fascinations seemed to overpower him, and, before he quite realised it, Vera had become part and parcel of his life.

On the way to the post-office, a little event had happened which had almost changed the current of his life.

They had taken the short cut from the Firs to the post-office, which lay over the hills, and were walking along arm in arm when suddenly Vera's foot slipped upon a stone, and she stumbled headlong in the path with a little, terrified cry.

In an instant Leonard had raised her, and to his utter consternation she clung to him half fainting.

"Oh, Mr. Trescott—Leonard—I—I have sprained my ankle! I cannot walk!" she said; and a low cry of pain broke from her lips.

He gathered her close in his arms, and did everything in his power to soothe her.

"I am so sorry—so sorry that I let you come with me. Let me carry you back to the house."

"My—my ankle is not sprained," she faltered; "it was only wrenched a little as it turned over against that stone. We will sit down on this log a few moments, and after a little rest I will be all right again."

To this Trescott willingly assented, but he did not remove his arm from the slender waist.

"I am so thankful that it is no worse, Vera," he breathed, huskily.

"Would you have cared so very much if I had sprained my ankle?" she faltered, looking up into his face with those great, dark, mesmerizing eyes that no one had ever yet been able to resist.

He looked away from her quickly, and did not reply.

"Would you?" she persisted, in her low, musical voice.

Throwing prudence to the winds, he turned to her suddenly and clasped her still closer in his arms.

"Does not your own heart teach you that, Vera?" he returned, hoarsely.

"Oh! if I could only believe what my heart would fain tell me," she murmured, "I—I would be so happy!"

"If it told you that I—I love you," he cried, "then it would—"

The rest of the sentence died away on his lips, for there, directly in the path before him, stood Mrs. Frost.

She might have been blind to all her beautiful niece's shortcomings, but she was not a woman to so mix right and wrong as to permit Vera to listen to a word of love from one she knew belonged, in the sight of Heaven, to another.

Vera was equal to the occasion.

"Oh, aunt!" she cried, "I am so glad that you happened along just now. I—I hurt my foot, and it was so painful that I had to sit down and rest; and Mr. Trescott was kind enough to remain here with me a few moments, although—although—besides the invitations we had to post, he had other important letters to go out to-day."

"Are you quite sure your ankle is not sprained, my dear?" cried Mrs. Frost, in alarm. "The wisest thing to do will be to come home with me at once, and we will send for a doctor to examine it."

Vera sprang to her feet with a wicked little laugh.

"See, it is better now—almost as good as new," she declared, "thanks to Mr. Trescott for insisting on my sitting down here to rest."

Had it been any one else but Vera, Leonard would have said the affair had been a clever little ruse to give him the opportunity to make love to her.

But in this instance it never occurred to him but that Vera was telling the plain facts—that her ankle had been wrenched, and with a few moments' rest it was as good as ever again.

Mrs. Frost looked greatly relieved.

"We may as well be going," said Vera, hoping that her aunt would pass on and leave them to enjoy the *tête-à-tête* which she had interrupted at such an inopportune time.

"I will go with you as far as the post-office," said Mrs. Frost; and the good soul did not notice the expression of annoyance on both faces, and, very much against the will of each, she accompanied them thence and back.

Vera was bitterly annoyed, but she was diplomatic enough to conceal it; and she could see, too, by Leonard's face that he was disappointed in being so ruthlessly cheated out of a *tête-à-tête* with her.

They loitered long by the way, trusting that Mrs. Frost would become impatient with their delay, and excuse herself to get back to the house in time to superintend dinner which was quite a feature at the Firs.

"You do not seem to be in any hurry to-day," laughed Vera, eying her aunt sideways.

"No; for it is not often that I indulge myself in going out for a stroll," answered Mrs. Frost, "and I need to make the most of it. If I am not back at the usual time Mercy will superintend affairs—bless her dear little heart! Why, she's a regular little jewel about the house, even with her affliction."

This praise of Mercy was anything but pleasant to Vera, especially when Trescott was present, and she turned the conversation at once into another channel.

As they neared the house they met one of the servants hurrying down the road.

"You are the very person I am looking for, ma'am," he cried, breathlessly. "There is something the matter with the range, and they are all in a stew over it, not knowing what to do until you come."

"Good gracious! if I step out of the house for a moment something is sure to happen," cried the good old lady, despairingly. "Say that I will be there directly, John;" and much to Vera's relief, she hurriedly left them.

"Why need we hasten?" said Trescott, in a low voice. "This is the pleasantest part of the afternoon."

"I am in no hurry," assented the girl.

"We will linger here in this delightful spot, and I will gather you some autumn leaves," cried Leonard.

"Would you like that?"

"Yes," she assented; "if you will help me to weave them into garlands."

"Nothing would give me more pleasure," he

declared; "that is, if you are not afraid of the old tradition becoming true."

She looked up into his face, blushing as crimson as the heart of a deep-red rose.

"I have never heard it," she said. "Do tell me what it is."

"By and by, with your permission, while we are weaving the garlands," Leonard answered, with a rich, mellow laugh. "If I should tell you beforehand, you might refuse to accept my services altogether."

"Is it so bad as that?" laughed Vera.

"You had better try the word *good* instead of *bad*. The idea would be more pleasant."

"Not knowing what you are talking about, and not possessing the key to solve the riddle of your incomprehensible words, I had better make no further reply, lest I get into deep water," she pouted. "But, really, you have aroused my curiosity."

"Well, when we have the first wreath made, then, and not until then, will I tell you what they say of the youth and maiden who weave autumn leaves for each other, and together. Come and sit on this mossy ledge. I will spread my overcoat upon it. It shall be your throne!"

"I will be a queen, but where will be my king?" laughed Vera, gaily.

"Your king will come a-wooing all in good time," he answered, his dark eyes seeking hers with a meaning glance, while the beauty cast coquette underlooks but too well.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Trescott had gathered about heaps of the beautiful, shining leaves.

"Oh, aren't they lovely!" cried Vera, delightedly. "I fairly adore autumn leaves."

"I did not know that you had such an eye for the beautiful in nature," he retorted, rather pleased.

"I adore everything that is handsome," she said, in a low voice, returning his look of a few moments ago with interest.

An hour flew by on golden wings, and the wreaths grew beneath their touch.

"Now you look indeed a queen!" cried Leonard, raising one gracefully, and laying it on the girl's dark curls. "You remind me just now of pictures I have seen of Undine and the woodland nymphs."

"Ah! but Undine had no heart," declared Vera.

"In some respects you are like Undine," he retorted. "She never knew she had a heart till she was conscious of its loss. Ah, but you do look bewitching, Miss Forsyth—Vera, with that wreath of autumn foliage on your head, like a crown of dying sunset. When I see the leaves turn in the autumn, lines that I read somewhere always recur to me:

"As bathed in blood the trailing vines appear,  
While round them, soft and low, the wild wind  
groves;  
The heart of autumn must have broken here,  
And poured her treasure out upon the leaves."

"What pretty poetry!" sighed Vera. "Why, it seems to me that you have some beautiful sentiment set to rhyme, to express almost every thought! You must love poetry. Does—does Mercy care for it?"

"No," he returned, in a low voice, and looked away from her with a moody brow.

"That is strange," mused Vera. "I should think that you would inspire her with a love for it."

"If it is not in one's soul, how can you expect to find it there," he retorted, rather bitterly.

"No, Mercy has no love for poetry, flowers, or birds, nor, in fact, anything that other young girls care for. I imagine she would quite as soon prefer a garden filled with hollyhocks and morning-glories to the daintiest flowers that ever bloomed. Alas, there are few tastes in common between us!"

#### CHAPTER XV.

"What a pity!" sighed Vera, and her hand crept sympathisingly into his. The gloomy look deepened on his face.

"Do you believe that there is a true mate for each heart, Vera," he asked suddenly.

"I might better ask you that question," she answered, evasively. "You are engaged—you seem to have found a heart that is the mate for your own."

"Do you think there is such a thing as making a mistake, even in so grave a matter?" he asked huskily, "and that those who discover their error should keep on straying further and further in the wrong path? Do you not believe that there should be the most ardent love between those who wed—and that where there is a lack of it the two should separate, and each go his or her own way?"

Vera dropped her head; but ere she could reply—utter the words that sprung to her lips—an exclamation of the deepest annoyance mingled with a fierce imprecation, was ground out between Trescott's teeth.

There, directly in the path before them, stood Maud Grant!

Had she been standing there long? If so, she must have heard every word that had been uttered.

Maud had heard, and every word had cut to her heart like the sharp point of a sword. She feared this, but had tried to reason the matter out in her own mind; but although circumstances did look tellingly against the beauty who had come to the Firs to be Mercy Wood's companion, yet she had tried to make herself believe that her suspicions were groundless.

"Have you been eavesdropping?" cried Vera, springing to her feet, her black eyes flashing luridly.

A thousand thoughts flashed through Maud Grant's mind in an instant.

No; she was too proud to let them realise that she had overheard the perfidy of Mercy's treacherous lover.

No; better plead ignorance, until she had time to think over the matter, for Mercy's sake, if not for her own.

"I have but just turned the bend in the road," she replied, with sweet girlish dignity. "Your question, Miss Forsyth, surprises me," she said. "I have no need to answer it, I think."

"But you always do happen around just when people least expect you, Miss Grant."

"I hope my old friends will always find my presence welcome," returned Maud, quietly.

"To be sure, you are welcome," interposed Leonard. "Miss Forsyth and I were only conversing upon the salient points of a new novel we finished reading yesterday. If you would care to hear it, I shall be pleased to go over the plot with you, and hear your opinion regarding it."

"I fear it would not benefit you, for I am not much of a novel reader, and understand very little of plots and plotting."

Was this a quiet drive at them? both thought as they looked up instantly.

But the soft, grey eyes of Maud Grant looked innocently enough from one to the other.

She seemed in no hurry to pass on, and Vera felt that for the second time that afternoon, her *l'écrit* with Leonard Trescott was to be broken up, and from this moment henceforth she owed Maud Grant more of a grudge than ever, and she felt sure that the girl knew it.

Upon one point Maud was determined that no matter how coldly Vera Forsyth might treat her, she should not leave Mercy's lover alone with her and in her power—the would stand by her poor, little blind friend, who needed her aid in this terrible hour more than she would ever know, Heaven help her!

Although long silences fell between the trio, still Maud lingered, chatting so innocently that they could not find it in their hearts to be very angry with her; and they could not bring themselves to believe that she had a purpose in her guileless actions.

There was nothing for it but to walk homeward with her; but they did not ask her in when they reached the gates of the Firs, and so Maud had no excuse to enter to see Mercy and warn her, but was obliged to pass on.

Mrs. Frost and two or three servants were at the door, so that there was no opportunity to exchange but a few whispered words. They

were just about to part when Vera happened to think that Trescott had not told her what was said of those who gather and weave autumn leaves together, as had promised.

She paused suddenly and looked up archly into his face.

"What about the autumn-leaf mystery?" she exclaimed. "You know you were to tell me all about it?"

"Do you promise not to be angry with me, Vera?" he answered, in his deep, musical voice. "You know I cannot help old adages—I do not make them."

"Why should I be angry?" she exclaimed, having rather a faint idea of what was coming.

"Well, then," said he, fixing his dark eyes full upon her, "it is said that the youth and maiden who twine the ruby and golden leaves together are intended for each other. There, are you so very angry?"

Vera dropped his arm with a little cry, and fled precipitately into the house.

He walked on slowly through the great hall and into the library. He knew Mercy would be waiting for him, and he did not feel equal to the ordeal of meeting her just then.

He wanted a moment to think. He felt that he was standing on the brink of a fearful abyss, and that one more step must prove fatal to him.

Which way should he turn? He was standing face to face with the terrible truth now, that he loved Vera Forsyth madly—loved her better than his own life—he, the betrothed of another.

But with that knowledge came another. Vera could be nothing to him, for they were both poor.

He was sensible enough to sit down and look the future in the face. He realised that if he should marry Vera on the spur of the moment, that would be only the beginning of the end.

It would be all gay and bright with them for a few brief weeks, or perhaps for a few months; then their sky would change, for Vera was not a girl to endure poverty for love's sake. She wanted the luxuries of life—these he could not give her; and there would be reproaches from the lips that now had only smiles for him.

(To be continued.)

## THE MYSTERY OF THE MONK'S ROOM.

—10:—

(Continued from page 222.)

"Then listen! Your father, Brian Carrington, did not die as was supposed when he made his escape from Portland. On the contrary, he was picked up by some fishermen, who, instead of betraying him, gave him food and shelter for some days, and finally helped him to get on board a vessel bound for Australia, he working his passage out. He landed in Melbourne penniless and friendless, and for many years it was a hard struggle with him to keep body and soul together; but at last he became assistant to a doctor, and partial success came to him. Then the desire to see England and, if possible, his wife, was too strong for him, and a few months ago he set sail for his native land. Arrived there, he lost no time in seeking the neighbourhood of Lynbridge, and, as he wanted to keep his identity secret, he took up his abode at a lonely old house on a moor."

He stopped, for Evelyn looked up into his face with an eager, penetrating gaze, while her lips quivered.

"Well," he said, gently, "do you understand, Evelyn? Is it necessary to tell you that the man you saw first in the Court grounds, that night when you were watching the Monks' Tower, was your father?"

He held out his arms, and, with a little cry of gladness, she crept into them, all the chords of her being vibrating with a sweet sense of utter confidence.

She, who had so long been bereft of a parent's care, at last knew the meaning of a father's love, and she silently thanked Heaven for the gift.

Gently and tenderly he led her to a chair, and

kneelt before her on one knee, still holding her hands in his.

"That night I did not know I had a daughter," he continued; "but there was something in your face which reminded me strongly of Isabel, and made me suspect the truth. I had not then seen my wife except from a distance. I did not intend seeing her, indeed, for I fancied she believed me guilty of stealing the jewels, and I hoped she had learned to forget me. But I was constantly in the neighbourhood of the Court, content if I even saw her shadow on the blind occasionally. It was then that I became aware of some strange proceedings in the Monks' Room, which I was watching when you came out. But you saw me on yet another occasion at the Court, although you did not recognise me. Do you remember the monk whom you found bending over the coffin the night before Miss Chandos's funeral?"

"Yes; I remember. I thought—" she cast her eyes down in some confusion, "it was a spirit."

He smiled, then looked distressed.

"I feared that was the case, and I dared not deceive you; but I have something to tell you now stranger than all that has gone before. When I heard of my wife's death I resolved that come what might I would see her, and to do so was fairly easy, as Morris, the caretaker here, works for an undertaker at W—, who was conducting the funeral arrangements. By his aid I got into the Court, and once there I slipped on a large black pall, thinking that if any of the servants should chance to see me they would think I was the spirit of the monk, concerning whom I knew various rumours were rife. When you knelt down, and covered your face, I took the opportunity of slipping out of the room, but I did not leave the Court. I remained there hidden until later on, when Morris came for the purpose of screwing down the coffin. Then I went once more to the death chamber, and completed an investigation that your presence had interrupted earlier in the evening.

"When I first touched the hand of my poor wife, it struck me as being less cold than dead bodies usually are, and it was certainly less rigid. My medical training stood me in good stead, and I applied various tests by which it is possible to ascertain whether the spirit has indeed finally departed to its last home. The conclusion I came to was that this was not the case.

"Isabel was in a trance—like enough to death, indeed, but not death itself. To restore animation would, I knew, be a difficult and dangerous task, but I felt myself equal to it, only I must apply my own remedies in my own way, and I knew it would be impossible to do this at the Court, so I formed a desperate plan. I took Morris into my confidence, and between us we removed Isabel from the coffin, which we filled with a plaster statue, taken out of the gallery, and wrapped up in a blanket."

Evelyn remembered the consternation the disappearance of this statue had caused to the house-keeper at the Court.

"Then we screwed the coffin-lid down, and by dint of watching our opportunity, we contrived to convey my wife to a cart that was standing outside in readiness, and brought her here. Can you bear to hear the rest, Evelyn?"

He had paused, because the young girl was trembling so violently that he feared she would lose all control over herself and burst into a storm of hysterical weeping. But he did not know her.

"Go on!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "Tell me all—all!"

"Well, then, my suspicions were correct. Isabel was not dead, but in a sort of mesmeric stupor into which she had been thrown by Dudley Fenton."

"Then she lives—she is here—it is she I saw in the flesh yesterday afternoon!" cried Evelyn, incoherently, rising to her feet, and stretching out her arms. "Oh, mother, mother!"

Meanwhile Ronald Heron was in London, investigating the circumstances attending Evelyn's marriage. Instead of seeing Mr. Unwin, he had gone straight to a well-known London barrister, putting the case before him, insisting on the fact



that the bride was not really aware of what she was doing when she consented to the marriage, and asking him if it could not be declared null and void.

His answer was a distinct negative. It would be extremely difficult to prove that the bride was not cognizant of her position, and a Court of Law would not accept the plea of mesmeric influence. If the service was conducted according to the canons of the English Church, there was no chance of its being set aside.

Horribly disappointed, Ronald left the Temple, and made his way to the city, where he found the church of which he was in search. But it was locked and given over for the time being to dust and emptiness; so he made inquiries as to the residence of the curate, and finally found himself in the extremely dingy lodgings occupied by the Reverend Howard Thompson.

Luckily the curate was at home—in point of fact he was having his tea, and apparently enjoying it, for a plate of hot muffins stood in front of the fire and the aroma of fragrant tea diffused itself pleasantly around. The young man rose to his feet in some confusion as his visitor was announced, from which it may be inferred that he had been taking his ease in an attitude that was more comfortable than clerical. Ronald's business was soon told. Did Mr. Thompson recollect marrying a young couple last Christmas Eve?

Mr. Thompson replied with animation that he did remember it very well—no wedding that he had ever assisted at had impressed him so much. There was something so exceedingly—er, well—uncommon in the bride's expression, and the way she gave her answers, that he had feared all was not quite as it should be, and his thoughts had often gone back to the recollection of it. No doubt the tragedy that followed it had also done a good deal towards fixing it in his mind.

"The tragedy!" Ronald repeated, "what do you mean?"

"Didn't you know that within a few hours of his marriage the bridegroom was dead?"

Ronald took a step backward in his surprise. "I hope I haven't been the means of giving shock to your feelings," exclaimed the curate, "on much trepidation at the effects of his words. Of course I thought you knew all about it."

"I know nothing whatever. You will do me a favour if you will tell me all there is to be told."

"Certainly," Mr. Thompson, responded. "You remember that it was a very foggy day—that Christmas Eve. My Rector was over in France, but he was to be back in time for me to get down to the West of England for Christmas Day. Directly after I had performed the wedding ceremony of which we have been speaking, I had a telegram from him, saying the weather was too bad for him to cross the Channel, so I must postpone my holidays until after Christmas. As I had nothing to do in the afternoon, I took the Underground to Westminster Bridge, and went to the hospital to see a patient who had been one of my parishioners, and whom I had promised to visit when I had time. While I was there I heard from one of the surgeons, who was also a friend of mine, that a very sad case had just been brought in—a young man of four or five-and-twenty had been knocked down and run over in the fog, and there was no hope of saving his life. My friend added that they had found cards in his pocket, but with no address on them, still, he added, the name was an uncommon one, so would be easily traced. I asked what it was, and he replied, 'Marcus Elliott,'—the first two names of the bridegroom I had married in the morning! This coincidence struck me as strange, and I asked if I could see the man. The moment I set eyes on his face I recognized him."

"But," said Ronald, eagerly, while a curious tide of memories swept across him, "the name of the man who married the lady of whom I have been speaking was Fenton. I have not heard his Christian name, but that of his father was Dudley."

"Yes—Dudley Elliott Fenton, and the son was Marcus Elliott Fenton. Both uncommon names. Perhaps that was the reason I remembered them so well."

Ronald sat down, pressing his hand to his brow. Evelyn's husband was, then, the man whom he himself had taken in a cab to the hospital, and left there, and later on in the evening, when he had gone to inquire how he was getting on, he had been conducted into the ward where the poor fellow lay dead, and had seen the father standing by the bedside. And the father was identical with the man of whose face he had caught such a transient glimpse in the library at Lynbridge Court, when Evelyn had confessed her marriage to him. What a fool he had been not to recognize him at the time! Fenton himself had been far more 'cute, and had disappeared with all celerity on seeing who the visitor really was.

Yes, Ronald saw it all now—saw, too, how Fenton had concealed the fact of Marcus's death in order to keep a hold over Evelyn. But the fact that impressed itself most on the young man's consciousness was that she was free at last—free to become his wife at any moment, and with that idea all paramount, he enthusiastically shook the curate by the hand, until that worthy but unfortunate young man could actually have wept with the pain of having his fingers squeezed!

Then Ronald left the city, and made all haste back to his hotel, intending to return to Lynbridge that same night.

But this he was not able to accomplish, for by the time he reached Waterloo the last train had gone, and he had to curb his impatience as best he might, and make up his mind to wait until the morning.

So it fell out that it was on Christmas Eve that he started on his journey, and then he did not arrive at his destination until evening owing to an accident on the line, which detained him for a couple of hours or so midway.

Before going home he made his way to the Court, all impatience to impart his discovery to Evelyn.

To his surprise the house was ablaze with lights, and as Lumley opened the door to him he instinctively became aware from the butler's expression that something had taken place which had changed the whole aspect of affairs in the household.

"Come in, Sir; come in!" cried Lumley, genially. "There's no standing order against admitting you now. Mr. Fenton's day is over, and the Court feels more like itself again."

"Why, what has happened, Lumley?"

But the butler shook his head mysteriously, and did not answer, feeling perhaps that he had better leave it to some one else to give an explanation. Opening the door of the library, he announced "Mr. Heron," and then discreetly retired.

There was only one occupant of the room at the moment—Evelyn.

She rose from her chair, trembling a little, though her cheeks rivalled the heart of the reddest rose that ever blossomed. Try as she would she could not prevent that tell-tale colour from dyeing her cheek.

Ronald never knew afterwards exactly in what words he made his communication; but he remembered Evelyn's shocked surprise as she heard of Marcus's death.

She had not loved him, it is true, but she nevertheless felt a very sincere sorrow for his tragic fate.

Still it was not in human nature that she could fail to rejoice in her freedom; and when Ronald had finished his story, and drew her pretty head down to his bosom, she let it rest there quite contentedly, and gave herself up to the sweet delight of knowing that at last "Love and life went hand in hand!"

But it was not for long that the lovers were permitted to remain undisturbed in their bliss.

Evelyn, too, had a story to relate; and it was one even more surprising than Ronald had just told to her. He had to learn that wonderful history of Isabel Chandos's resuscitation—which at first he could hardly believe true—and of Brian Carrington's return, of the finding of the jewels, of Brian's visit to the police-station, whence he returned to the Court bringing with him an inspector and two stout constables, of

Fenton's furious anger when he was called upon to hand over the jewels, and his absolute refusal to do so.

The refusal, however, did not avail him much, for he and Lucy Needham were both placed under arrest while a search was instituted, and when the search resulted in nothing, Fenton himself was examined, and the jewels were found concealed in a chamois leather belt worn under his clothes.

The rage of the baffled villain defies description, but he made one last desperate effort at revenge by declaring that when he left the Court he should insist on Evelyn's accompanying him and returning to her husband.

He thought better of this threat a little later, however, when Carrington gave him his choice of either leaving at once and alone or of being arrested on the charge of having stolen the jewels.

He sullenly accepted the former alternative, and was thereupon taken to the station by the inspector, who saw him safely into the London train—which also conveyed Lucy Needham to the great metropolis. But as we love fair play sufficiently to give even a certain unmentionable gentleman down below his due, so we must in justice to Mr. Dudley Fenton record that he was quite innocent of intending to do Isabel Chandos any harm when she found him in the Monk's Room on that terrible night.

Her own terror was great, and she had screamed on seeing him, upon which the idea had flashed across him that he might silence her by that same power which had been so effectual in bending her daughter's will to his own. He accordingly made a few passes in front of her face, and she had shown herself at once susceptible to his mesmeric influence, for she had fallen down without uttering a word, and he had made his escape into the room below, where he waited until Evelyn and the butler had passed by. Then, while they were in the upper part of the Tower, it had been easy enough for him to leave it.

Evelyn had hardly finished her recital of the morning's events, when Isabel came into the library leaning on the arm of her husband—pale and thin indeed, but with a light of happiness in her eyes that had not been there for many a long year, and which seemed to make her a dozen years younger. And indeed she had cause for happiness, inasmuch as husband and daughter were both restored to her, and all the world knew that Brian Carrington was innocent of the crime for which he had suffered.

It was a very happy party that gathered round the great Christmas fire of pine logs that Christmas Eve, and as we never appreciate sunshine so much as after we have passed through shadow, so joy is never so keen as when it follows sorrow. Perhaps all four of the principal personages of our story felt this, and it made them rather silent. Maybe two of them were thinking of that Christmas Eve twelve months ago, when life had been at its darkest, and when neither of them dreamed that their meeting on the bridge above the dark flood of the river would end in such happiness as this.

It was Isabel Carrington who finally broke the silence that had hovered over the little party.

"Evelyn," she said, "as we have arranged that your marriage shall take place early in the New Year, I shall give you a Christmas present and wedding present all in one. The jewels that have played so important a part in our history shall be your wedding dowry," and as she spoke she passed to her daughter the casket where, on their bed of purple velvet, the opals and diamonds flashed in the light.

At the same moment there came borne on the frosty silence the sound of bells ringing their Christmas greetings across the valley. With one impulse they all went to the window, and gazed out on the snowy landscape, over which the starlight fell, and the cadences of the bells swelled out loud and clear their "tidings of great joy!"

[THE END.]

CANADIANS are the largest tea-drinkers in the world.

## FACETIE.

THERE is always room for a man of force, and he makes room for many.

A BOY read that "the good die young," and is going to the bad for self-protection.

THE fool never has an idea that is too large to slip out of his mouth.

A MAN likes to see himself in print, a woman prefers to see herself in satin.

WIVES should always sit up for their husbands. It makes two hours' difference in their arrival.

SHE (at the piano): "I do so love music." Rude Brother: "Then I wonder you don't leave off playing."

PRETTY girls are like confectionery in more ways than one. They are sweet; and they are conducive to heartburn.

HE (who is going abroad to seek his fortune): "You'll be true to me, won't you, darling?" She: "Ye—yes, George, if you're successful."

"YOUR wife must take more exercise." "But, doctor, what can I do? She refuses to stir." "Give her some money to go shopping with."

VISITOR: "Nora, you are certain your mistress is out, are you?" NORA: "Well, just to make sure, I'll go back and ask her if that's what she said."

"LOVE your wife as you would love your soul, but beat her as you would your fur," is said to be the doctrine by which the Russian peasant guides his matrimonial relations.

"SHALL I play 'Over the garden wall'?" asked an organ-grinder. "No," replied the householder, "I would rather you would play in the next street."

SHE: "I wonder why it is that women are not as great poets as men are?" He: "That's an easy one. The Muse is a woman, and it takes a man to manage her."

GEORGE: "I'm afraid Ethel doesn't love me any more." JACK: "What makes you think so?" GEORGE: "Last night she introduced me to her chambermaid."

BARBER: "This is the best shaving-soap I've ever used." Customer (who has suffered patiently): "Well, it doesn't taste any better than that you had last week."

"TRUTH is stranger than fiction," he happened to remark. "Yes," his wife replied very gently, "it sometimes seems so to me when you are explaining what kept you out so late."

PROOF POSITIVE—"How do you know that it was a man that wrote this novel?" Helen: "Because the story takes you over a space of ten years and the heroine never has a new dress the whole time."

"THREE, I knew I'd forgotten something," remarked Jaggs, after his sixth drink. "Boggs told me to take whisky and glycerine for my cold, and I declare I've forgotten all about the glycerine."

BRIDGET: "Wot's the most genteel thing for a lady, as a lady, to carry in the streets, Nora?" Cook: "Sure, thin, some prefers a three-volume book; but I prefer a roll of music myself—quite careless and aisy like."

"Yes," said the landlady, after a fruitless search for her guest's silk umbrella, "I thought it had been stolen, and now I am satisfied that it was." "You may be satisfied," replied the guest, drily, "but I'm blest if I am."

YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER (after gazing helplessly at the different cuts): "I want a piece that I can use for soup." Butcher: "People generally get forelegs for soup, ma'am." Young Housekeeper (aghast): "How many did you say? Four?"

Two chums were in boudoir conversation. "Isn't Beatrice awfully extravagant?" exclaimed Birdie. "She has a parasol for every dress, and she never even opens them." Marie laughed, and said, "Pooh! she can't. There is only one parasol. The rest are only covers."

TOMMY had been boasting about his new brother. "How old is he, Tom?" asked the policeman. "Two weeks," said Tom. "He's very small, isn't he?" "Yes," said Tom, "he's pretty small—that is, all except his voice."

DOCTOR: "Come here, my little man, and shake hands with me. You know who I am, don't you?" REGINALD: "Oh, yes; you are the doctor ma says gives bad medicines and charges a big price."

NEW MAN (Signal office): "Indications are for fair weather and northerly winds. Which flag shall I put out?" OLD MAN: "Oh, any of 'em. Nobody knows the difference except sailors, and it's too foggy for them to see."

MR. CHEEK: "Doctor, what's my bill?" Doctor: "Well, Mr. Cheek, I understand you are poor, and I've made up my mind not to charge you anything." Mr. Cheek: "That's all right enough; but what I want to know is who is going to settle the druggist's bill?"

THE REV. ROSY BABBLETON (examining): "Now, children, who can tell me what an epidemic is? What! none of you? Let me prompt your memory. It is something that spreads. And now—ah, little Johnny knows, you see. What is it, my little friend?" "Jam, sir."

"DIDN'T you say six months ago that if Miss Meier wouldn't marry you you would throw yourself into the deepest part of the sea? Now, Miss Meier married some one else three months ago, and yet you haven't—" "Oh, it's easy to talk, but let me tell you it is not such an easy matter to find the deepest part of the sea."

WIFE: "I know I am rather late in getting dressed, but we can reach the theatre before the overture is over, can't we?" Husband (gloomily): "Y—es, if there's a fire down town." "A fire! What earthly good would that do?" "We might get a chance to ride down on a fire-engine."

"So the Commander-in-Chief rides up," says Michael Sullivan, recounting his own valiant doings in the Crimea, "the Commander-in-Chief rides up as the army stood in line of battle, and he calls out, 'Is Mike Sullivan in the ranks?'" "Here I am, general," said I, stepping forward. "Then let the engagement begin," said he.

PRECAUTIONARY—"John," called out Mrs. Billus, "are you ready to put up those new curtain fixtures?" "I am beginning to put them up now, Maria," was the response that came in a metallic tone of voice from the parlour. "Children," said Mrs. Billus, with nervous haste, "run out and play!"

PROFESSOR POTTERBY: "Mr. Fresshon, I observe that you use the phrase 'single-handed and alone' in your thesis. Do you not think that the idea may as well be expressed with the omission of the last two words?" Fresshon: "No, sir, I do not. For instance, I have often driven a horse single-handed, but I wasn't alone."

GRIFFIN (telling his ladylove—the latest—a very interesting yarn about an illness he once had): "Yes, it was a hard time, I assure you. Do you know, at one period I thought I should lose my mind entirely." "And did you, Mr. Griffin?" asked his ladylove, meekly. He did not quite like her question, though she did ask it so prettily.

An old woman walked into a bank the other day in Scotland, threw down her deposit-book, and said she wished to draw all her money. Having got it, she retired to a corner of the room and counted it. She then marched up to the teller and exclaimed, "Ay, that'll do, ma man; jist pit it back again. I only wanted to see if it was a richt."

BEHIND THE SCENES.—Manager of Show: "Well, what's the matter now, John?" Property Man: "Everything's gone wrong. The crocodile says he'll go out if you don't pay him his last week's salary; the bearded woman wants an ounce of tobacco, and he's angry because I won't lend him five cents to get it with; and the fasting girl says she'd rather starve than eat the steak the butcher sent."

BANGLE: "The careless way in which new words are added to the language is abominable. For instance, the word 'type-writer' may mean either a mechanism or the human being who runs the mechanism." DANGLE: "Just so." Bangle: "Then how is anyone to know whether a man is talking about the machine or the girl?" Dangle: "Watch his face."

THEY had been engaged to be married fifteen years, and still he had not mustered up courage enough to ask her to name the happy day. One evening he called in a peculiar frame of mind, and asked her to sing something tender and touching, something that would "move him." She sat down at the piano and sang, "Darling, I am growing old."

NEWLY-MARRIED lady (highly accomplished): "Why, Briggita, those eggs you have purchased are remarkably small." Cook: "Yes, ma'am, but there are no bigger ones to be got." Lady: "Then you will please instruct the farmer to allow his eggs in future to remain a sufficient period in the nest until they have acquired the proper dimensions."

MR. SCHUMPFER: "I asked your daughter a very important question last night and she referred me to you." Old Gentleman: "Humph! What did you ask her?" "I asked her if she'd marry me." "Well, she won't!" "Rt? Has she said so?" "No; but from what I know of the girl I don't believe she would have bothered herself about me if she really wanted you."

TEACHER (illustrating angles): "The original inhabitants of New York lived along the rivers, and laid out the first street at right angles to the water-fronts. Do you understand that?" Pupik: "Yes'm." "But the water-fronts were not parallel. They met at a point, forming an acute angle. Do you understand that?" "Yes'm." "Now, what was the result when all these streets finally met?" "New York!"

"WISH to leave, Parkins? Why, you only came yesterday." "Yes, mum. In engaging I thought you was a spartegreen and champagne gentry. But when I ears from the cook last night that you eat portaters, cabbage, carrots, and such like second-hand vegetables, and drinks beer, I says to myself, 'This ain't no place for you, Parkins. You must look out for somethink more esthetic!'"

A VISITOR to Lancaster Asylum a short time since encountered one of the lunatics (who, doubtless, had been told off for work of some description) pushing a wheelbarrow along one of the walks wrong side up. The visitor inquired why he reversed the order of things in that fashion. "Why, you stupid, do you think I'm mad?" was the lunatic's reply. "If I turned the right side up, they'd be putting something into it."

"THIS remedy, sir," said the clerk at the chemist's, taking down a bottle of patent medicine from one of the shelves, "is highly recommended for the ailment you are suffering from. The firm that compounds it has bushels of testimonials. It has cured thousands of cases." "I've no faith in testimonials," grumbled the customer. "Give me a bottle of some kind of mixture, if you've got it, that has never been known to cure anybody."

AN energetic German professor was conducting a musical society. They were studying Mendelssohn's "Elijah," and had reached the chorus. "Hear us, Bawl; hear, mighty God!" The men's voices were booming out sonorously, when the conductor cried out, "No—de dreadful vowel! Don't say Bawl; soften a little—give de more musical sound, Bawl." Whereupon the chorus took up the strain again, "Hear us Bawl; hear us Bawl!"

A MEMBER of the House of Commons had been paying attention to a young lady for a long while, and had taken her to attend the House until she was well posted in the rules. On the last day of the Session, as they came out, he bought her a bouquet of flowers, and said to her, "May I offer you my handful of flowers?" She replied, promptly, "I move to amend by omitting all after the word 'handful'!" He blushing accepted the amendment, and they adopted it unanimously.



## SOCIETY.

PRINCESS LOUISE OF WALES, Duchess of Fife, has become a patroness of the Kind-hearted Brigade, which has been four years in existence, and has over eighty thousand members.

LADY ROBERTS was lately the recipient of a valuable diamond bracelet, subscribed for by many friends in recognition of her husband's distinguished services in India.

THERE was much rejoicing in the family of the King of Italy on the birthday of his beloved Queen Margherita, of whom he is as romantically fond as if they were still a pair of young lovers. The Queen is now forty-one, but in face she does not look within several years of that age.

THE Czarina of Russia employs a perfect establishment of sempstresses and needlewomen; notwithstanding which, she has been in the habit of making nearly all the clothing for her youngest children, and their new hats she takes all to pieces and trims them afterward according to her own taste.

NOTHING seems to produce so excellent an effect on the Queen's spirits as a theatrical performance, and it is gratifying to learn that she has been successfully urged to try this very pleasant prescription on future occasions. There is, however, no likelihood that Her Majesty will break through her thirty years' rule by attending any of the London theatres.

It is believed that the Duke of York is very anxious that his marriage should take place quietly, and that the festivities in connection with it should follow. In his Royal Highness's position, this would be a difficult matter to arrange, as the nation has enormous interest in the event. The circumstances are, however, peculiar, and the Duke is a man of much decision of character.

THE official organ of the Vatican lately announced that the Pope will grant his dispensation for the marriage of Prince Ferdinand of Roumania and Princess Maria of Edinburgh only on condition that all the children shall be brought up in the Catholic faith. If this is correct, the marriage cannot take place, for it is a fundamental article in the Constitution of Roumania that all children of the sovereign, or of his heir, are to be brought up as members of the Orthodox Church.

THE King of Roumania is a most energetic walker, rivaling even the Emperor of Russia, for he prefers walking exercise to any other. When he is at Sinia he rises early, in order that he may take a good walk in the park before his nine o'clock breakfast, and on these expeditions he is always accompanied by a very fine and large Danish hound, which answers to the name of "Mouck."

ALL the rumours to the effect that the Prince of Wales was contemplating leaving Sandringham are devoid of foundation. After the death of the Duke of Clarence the Princess of Wales expressed a wish to leave the Norfolk home, but time has done his work of healing, and Her Royal Highness has no dislike now to the place where her eldest son died. Since the fire no less than twenty new rooms have been constructed upon a more commodious plan. There have been many additions to the stables, too, and the cottage will be renamed the Duke of York's Cottage, and handed over to him for a residence.

THE Queen has decided to accept the Dowager Lady Crawford's offer to place the Villa Palmieri at Her Majesty's disposal if she visits Florence next spring. This celebrated villa was purchased by the late Lord Crawford from the Grand Duke of Tuscany, to whom it had been bequeathed by an Irish lady who resided there for many years. The villa, which stands in lovely grounds on the Fiesole road, was reconstructed and greatly improved by Lord Crawford, and the Queen was delighted with the place when she passed a month there during the spring of 1886. Her Majesty will arrive at Florence shortly before Easter, probably on Saturday, March 25th.

## STATISTICS.

THE books printed in Great Britain yearly amount to about six a day.

FOR over 900 years Nuremberg, Bavaria, has made most of the toys used throughout the world.

A MATHEMATICIAN estimates that the earth can comfortably support 5,294,000,000 people, and that in 187 years this number will exist.

As an example of how little things count up, it may be mentioned that it takes nearly one hundred gallons of oil a year to keep a large-sized locomotive in running order.

THERE is a lighthouse to every fourteen miles of English coast, to every thirty-four miles of Irish coast, and one to every thirty-nine miles of Scottish shore line.

## GEMS.

IDLE men do not think; they only dream.

TRUE popularity takes deep root and spreads itself wide, but the false falls away like blossoms, for nothing that is false can be lasting.

IN good company you need not ask who is the master of the feast. The man who sits in the lowest place, and who is always industrious in helping everyone, is certainly the man.

WHOEVER is in a hurry shows that the thing he is about is too big for him. To be courteous does not take much time, but it takes a little. He who would be courteous must not be in such haste that he cannot be sympathetic, nor so absorbed that he cannot be considerate for others.

THERE are men of *esprit* who are excessively exhausting to some people. They are the talkers who have what may be called jerky minds. Their thoughts do not run in the natural order of sequence. They say bright things on all possible subjects, but their zigzags rack you to death. After a jolting half-hour with one of these jerky companions, talking with a dull friend affords great relief. It is like taking the cat in your lap after holding a squirrel.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A COOL room above ground is better for milk than a cellar, and it should always be remembered that milk should not stand near vegetables, fish or meat of any kind, as it invariably absorbs the flavour of what is near it.

QUEEN CAKES.—4 oz. butter, 4 oz. sugar, 4 oz. flour, 8 eggs, 2 oz. currants,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoonful essence of lemon. Beat the butter and sugar to a cream, then beat eggs already well beaten, then the flour, currants, and flavouring. Butter Queen cake pans, and dust sugar over them, three-quarter fill them, and bake till ready. The sugar should be fine.

YANKEE CAKE.— $1\frac{1}{2}$  teacupful of sugar, 3 teacups flour, 1 teacup buttermilk, 1 tablespoon butter, 1 teaspoon carbonate of soda, 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon grated nutmeg,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. raisins. Beat the butter with a spoon till it is soft, then add the sugar, flour, soda, and spices, then the milk, and mix well. Pour into a cake tin and bake till ready. There are no eggs.

PRUNE MOULD.—Boil one pound of prunes for an hour in a half pint of water with the finely-peeled rind of a lemon, then let it stand till cool, when the stones must be removed and the prunes bruised till quite tender, and finally pulped through a coarse sieve. Now stir in the strained juice of a lemon and one ounce of best sheet gelatine dissolved in a very little water. Simmer this all well together for twenty minutes, then again set it aside to cool, when it must be poured into a mould well rinsed in cold water and allowed to set. Serve with whipped cream and garnished with shred almonds.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE family name of the Queen is Este Guelph. MRS. GLADSTONE is passionately fond of fragrant flowers.

THACKERAY wrote most of his best work before breakfast.

LORD TENNYSON was, it now appears, an admirable astronomer.

THE leaf of the banana is usually 6ft. long by 2ft. wide.

BLOTTING-PAPER is made of cotton rags boiled with soda.

THE best parchment for banjos is made of wolf skin.

THE fruit of the nutmeg tree takes nine months to mature.

CORNISH miners believe that it is unlucky to whistle underground.

THE average Englishman lives twenty years longer in England than in Africa.

SHIELDS were not used in Europe, save on parade, after the time of Francis I., 1550.

THE average age at which women marry, in civilized countries, is twenty-five and a half years.

THE Czar of Russia is so strong that he can tear a pack of cards to pieces, fifty-two cards at a time.

BERLIN pays a salary to a professional bird-catcher, who keeps scientific and educational institutions supplied with birds, birds' nests and eggs, and he is the only man in the empire permitted to do so.

THE two most common exclamations uttered by the Arabs when they saw the first engine on the Jaffa-Jerusalem Railway enter the Holy City were:—"What is the Great God doing?" "This is the work of Satan."

It is announced from the War Office that the Postmaster-General has approved of the maximum limit of age for appointment as postmen and porters being extended from 30 to 32 years, so as to admit of time-expired soldiers of 12 years' service and upwards being eligible.

HARP-PLAYING is becoming a fashionable recreation for ladies, and banjos and guitars will soon be replaced by this more elegant and dignified rival. Aside from its musical capabilities, the harp is an ornamental feature of any parlour, and as such is likely to meet with high favour.

EXPERIMENTS have been going on for the last two years for the purpose of trying to learn something of the characteristics of the Atlantic Ocean as a great moving body of water. As a result the whole Atlantic is shown to be slowly circulating round and round like an enormous pool.

THE palace of the King of Siam is enclosed in high white walls which are a mile in circumference. Within them are contained temples, public offices, seraglios, stables for the sacred elephant, accommodation for 1,000 troops, cavalry, artillery, war elephants, an arsenal, and a theatre.

THE windows of the London restaurants frequently contain startling sights that are the result of the genius of the proprietors. Two cloves and five toothpicks can make a lemon look like a hog, the shells of lobsters and crabs can be weaned into many quaint and horrible shapes. These are considered attractions, and a man who is prolific of such devices can always find work in these restaurants.

MILK has been found to contain remarkable healing qualities if applied to wounds in an early stage, and excellent results have been obtained by its use in the dressing of burns. Compresses are soaked in milk and laid on the burn, to be renewed night and morning. An extensive burn has in this way been reduced in three days to one-quarter of its original size. Another burn, which had been treated for eight days with olive oil and oxide of zinc, healed rapidly under a milk dressing.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**TOSH.**—Tosh is just an abbreviated form of the well-known Highland name Macintosh.

**WORRIED.**—Rudeness to seniors, especially in the presence of guests, is altogether inexcusable.

**BUFFER.**—A landlord can double a tenant's rent for any reason that he chooses, and for no reason at all.

**CHRISTOPHER.**—It was Lord Byron who said of himself, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous."

**A. T.**—A dog tax was imposed in 1796 and again in 1808; the amount in the latter year being 12s. per dog.

**DOLLY.**—The object of rubbing a violin bow with resin is to prevent the bow scratching.

**CORA.**—A married woman may take out a copyright in her maiden name if she uses it as her *nom de plume*.

**LUTITIA.**—Your best plan is to write to the firm of lawyers for the information. There are four firms of the name.

**E. H.**—Ewart is pronounced as if spelt "Euart"; Hawarden as if spelt "Harden"; and Leveson in two syllables.

**AWKWARD.**—The only way to overcome such feelings is to mix in company as much as possible, and not to think about yourself.

**JEANETTE.**—It costs nothing to change your surname. You are legally entitled to call yourself by any name you like.

**A FAMILY DISPUTE.**—You cannot compel your sister to contribute towards the support of your mother. These matters are left to natural affection.

**SUFFERING ONE.**—The best thing you can do is to apply at Ophthalmic Hospital, and you will be sure to get the best possible advice.

**T. A. T.**—The harvest moon is the moon which is at the full nearest to the date of the autumnal equinox, about September 23.

**VIOLET.**—It is a common thing and needs no special treatment, as such things go away in time, and are of no consequence whatever.

**ENTHUSIAST.**—If you call at your nearest post-office, you will get a paper gratis, which contains full information about entering the army.

**M. M.**—The imprisonment does nothing to clear off the debt. The man can be committed a second time if he does not pay.

**TROUBLE.**—A bankrupt is not allowed to retain any portion of his estate; nor is he entitled to an allowance from the creditors.

**MADGE.**—There is no prescription for the permanent removal of hair except the electric needle, which must be used by an expert.

**SEARCHER.**—It may be as the song says "there's a balm for every wound," but if there is a certain cure for corns we don't know it.

**CARLO.**—1. The dog license was fixed at 5s. in April, 1867; and at 7s. 6d. in 1878. 2. The 4th of July, 1851, was on a Friday.

**J. G.**—Santos is in Brazil, and for months past our Government have been warning emigrants to keep away from that country.

**THURSO.**—A lack of rupees, in the East Indies, is one hundred thousand rupees, which, at 2s. each, amounts to £10,000—a little little sum for a legacy.

**R. S.**—An Army Reserve man can be employed as a railway detective; if he has a second-class certificate it should stand him in good stead.

**HESTER.**—Second cabin to Cape is £25; stowage, £15 to £17; climate off the coast is very fine, and specially suitable to invalids.

**ANXIOUS MOTHER.**—You ought to have had treatment for him long ago. The only thing to do now is to take him to a hospital and get him treated as an out-patient.

**UNHAPPY ONE.**—No length of absence dissolves a marriage; but a wife cannot be compelled to live with her husband if she objects to do so.

**BEAUTY.**—It is said that such marks can be removed by electricity. We cannot answer for it in the case you mention. We would advise to leave the marks alone.

**A. M. T.**—You would probably get the information by applying to the secretary of the Civil Service Commission, Cannon Row, Westminster, London, S.W.

**NIGHTINGALE.**—Your tuner will put your piano to any pitch you desire; the common thing is half a note under concert pitch, but there is no fixed rule.

**INQUIRER.**—The cost of even an undefended divorce action is generally about £40, because even when there is no defence, the offence has to be proved.

**P. E. W.**—Men are not now permitted to serve for twenty-one years to qualify for a pension, except they attain the rank of non-com. before their time with the colours is up.

**BERT.**—Yes, the moment the pathway is obstructed by the parties the police can move them on, and prosecute them if they resist, or in defiance of the "moving" make a practice of loitering at the place.

**SUBSCRIBER.**—You cannot use the Royal arms on trade papers without permission, nor can you in any way describe yourself as a purveyor to the Queen. You may in either case be proceeded against for penalties.

**M. D.**—While you know that your first wife is alive you cannot legally contract a second marriage on any pretence whatever, unless you first obtain a divorce.

**D. L.**—Hyde Park, London, 400 acres; the Phoenix Park, Dublin, 1,753 acres; Hyde Park is the second smallest of the London parks, St. James's being the smallest.

**CUTHERBERT.**—As the owner of the yacht proposes to carry passengers in her he must have a Board of Trade certificate, such as you will see hung in the saloon of all river boats.

**A READER.**—If you have a hawk's license, costing £2, you can travel with a van selling all sorts, except liquors or tobacco, from Land's End to John o' Groat's if you wish.

**QUEENIE.**—The prefix "Lord" to the title Mayor of a Corporation is peculiar to the civic officers of London, Dublin, Edinburgh, and York; so that the gentleman in office is Lord Mayor of York.

**DADDY.**—You need give only a week's notice, as he is a weekly tenant despite the fact that he pays his rent quarterly. He took the cottage at so much a week, and that makes him a weekly tenant.

**BOB.**—The Canadian Pacific Co. own 4,000 miles of railway, but control or run over 6,609; while the Grand Trunk of Canada own 2,943 miles, and work 4,014 miles.

**VOYAGER.**—There isn't any "sure preventive" of sea-sickness, but about 12 to 14 grains of anti-pyrene taken each day for three days previous to sailing, and same three days after sailing is regarded as almost a specific.

**GUR.**—The last total eclipse of the sun observed in England was on May 22, 1724, and except one on August 12, 1799, there can be no total eclipse of the sun visible in England for 230 years.

## A LESSON IN LIFE.

"The sun set on a sea of brilliant hues,  
Crimson and gold and azure; one by one  
I saw the colours blend and interfuse,  
And follow down the pathway of the sun.  
I almost wished with them to fade away  
Over the distant edge, and die as they."

Thus spake my friend half-lightly; but my heart  
Shrank, trembling at the words with sudden dread,  
"And when the time shall come for us to part,  
Must each go on his way alone?" I said;  
"And in that unknown country shall we meet,  
Or seek each other with unresting feet?"

"Shall we love there, as here—what thinkest thou?"  
He answered slowly with a thoughtful face:  
"If from my nature could be taken now  
All memories, passions, hopes, the love and grace  
Which is of thee, and maketh up the whole,  
'Twould leave the merest shadow of a soul:

"But if our lives begin anew, 'twill be  
As if we ne'er had lived." With blanched cheek  
I answered, "Say not that, it frighteth me,"  
"Why," said he, smiling, "how art thou so weak?  
Why fear or wonder? Let us live our best,  
And to our Father's goodness leave the rest."

**PAT.**—Man born anywhere, of Irish parents, is Irish, according to law; "Boyne Water" is a party tune, but "St. Patrick's Day" is a National one; all true-born Irishmen "step out" to that without thought of party.

**MILLY.**—Cut glass should be first thoroughly washed and dried, then rubbed with prepared chalk, using a soft brush and being careful not to neglect any of the crevices. This will give it a fine polish.

**GRANINE.**—Whisky is obtained from the fermented wort of malt or grain. The inferior qualities are prepared from barley, oats, or rye, a small portion only of which is malted, and also from potatoes mashed.

**HARD-UP.**—You would have as great difficulty in procuring employment in New York as in London. If you can turn your hand to agricultural labour, you would be more likely to get employment in Canada.

**B. M.**—Emigrants are strongly advised not to go to Brazil at present. You should disregard any inducement which may be held out to you either in cheap passage, grant of land, &c.

**SEPHIX.**—The sphinx, that is rarely seen in menageries, is one of the names of the Guinea baboon. It is thought to be one of the species represented on the Egyptian monuments.

**B. G. R.**—If you have any complaint to make against him, your best plan is to write and state the facts to the Postmaster-General, St. Martin's-le-Grand, and the wrong, if any, will be rectified.

**JACK.**—The *Great Eastern* was never at any pier on the Clyde, but she lay for the better part of two years at the Tail of the Bank opposite Greenock, being towed thence to Liverpool to be broken up.

**BILLY.**—There is no patent for medicines, but if a man puts Government stamps on his packets or bottles, he must have what is called a patent medicine vendor's license before he can sell.

**S. A.**—You cannot "seize"—or distrain—at all, excepting for rent owing, unless you have obtained judgment from the Court; and then you cannot seize articles entrusted to the debtor to deal with in the way of his business.

**E. N.**—To become a Queen's cadet, a youth must pass an examination in mathematics, French, German, geometrical drawing, geography, &c. There is a further competitive examination. The limit of age is from sixteen to eighteen.

**AGATHA.**—No gold is perfectly pure, the purest known containing one-quarter to one-half a carat of other metal. The number of carats designating the quality of the metal, when less than 24, indicates the amount of gold in the mixture, the remainder being alloy.

**GOOGLES.**—France retains possession of Pondicherry, Chandernagore, and a few other of her once-important dependencies in India, and also considerable possessions in Further India. Trichinopoly is part of the Madras Presidency.

**S. A.**—New Zealand should suit you admirably, and the voyage out should go far to restore your health, meanwhile; let the agents know you think of selling if you get a reasonable offer; they may have a client prepared to buy.

**T. E. A.**—There are recruiting agents in all the large American cities. No bounty is paid upon enlistment in the regular Army of the United States. A man need not be naturalised. He could not enlist out of the United States.

**IN DOUBT.**—You are in law not bound to refund any part of the sum advanced upon the goods stolen from you by the pawnbroker, but it is customary to arrange in such cases to divide the loss by the owner repaying half the sum advanced.

**CURIOUS.**—The proverbial expression, "Dead as a door-nail," is taken from the nail on which, in old doors, the knocker strikes. It is therefore been used as a comparison to any one irretrievably dead—one visited with death, such as reiterated strokes on the head would naturally produce.

**DISPUTANT.**—Nine persons out of ten would probably give the derivation of "blind-fold" as coming directly from "blind" and "fold," from the practice of "folding" a cloth round the eyes, as in the game of blind-man's-buff. The word has, however, nothing to do with "fold," but means "folded," or struck blind, and might be written "blind-felled."

**E. G. W.**—A *Letter of Marque* is a license given to a ship belonging to private individuals by a government in time of war, empowering the said ship to seize and plunder the ships of the enemy. The practice was first adopted by Edward I., during his war against the Portuguese. Privateering was abolished by the sovereigns of Europe by treaty, March 30, 1856, and by the treaty of Washington privateering was prohibited.

**J. Y.**—It is the recognized rule that seamen's wages are paid up to the date of the vessel being posted at Lloyd's as missing; but there is no decision of a court of law on the point, and if the owners refuse to pay to date of posting, your only alternative would be an action for recovery of amount; it is a committee of Lloyd's who decide when an overdue vessel must be posted as missing.

**GINGER.**—The water spider spends most of its time under water; it carries a bubble of air for breathing on the under side of its body, and when this air is exhausted it comes to the surface for more. It is enabled to carry the air bubble because the under side of its body is covered with tiny hairs set so close together that the surface film of the water does not pass them, although the air does, and thus the air is imprisoned among the hairs.

**FLORA.**—To preserve flowers in a fresh state for several months a good plan is to dip them when freshly gathered in perfectly limpid gum water, and after allowing them to drain for two or three minutes, set them upright in a vase. Some sorts of flowers may be pressed between sheets of blotting-paper and heavy weights above them. This is effectual at times in preserving the colour of many specimens, but not always. The colour can be given afterwards by a dye.

**LITTLE TOMMY TOUCHER.**—The little raft of eggs that gnats set afloat on the water are kept from sinking and from being upset from the fact that the tiny eggs have their points all upward, and they are glued together so closely that while there is open space all around the point of each egg, yet the width of these spaces is so slight that water cannot readily pass through. You may again and again upset such an egg raft, but it will right itself every time, and the upper surface will remain dry.

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